Sevens

4 - The Fourth Generation was a Money-Loving Submissive Husband

Wai

Prologue

Inside the Circry House's estate in Arumsaas, I was eating my meal.

I usually eat Novem's cooking, but only for today, a certain【Toxic Automaton】insisted she would do it, and she wouldn't budge on the matter.

It seems she possesses a sense of rivalry against Novem, but it's strange no matter how you look at it.

That scrap metal maid… the moment she came to the mansion, she directed an attack at the girl.

She had picked up the nearest broom, and tried to lower it on Novem's head, but I stopped her…

"How is it? The taste of the food I put my all into making for a wimpy chicken dickwad?"

Chicken dickwad was likely referring to me.

It seems that since I didn't have the high spirits of when we first met, she added a wimpy to it.

"No, it's delicious. It's much tastier than I imagined, but…"

"But? But what? A chicken dickwad has some complaints to voice against my cooking? Now out with it. Tomorrow, I'll make use of those complaints to prepare the supreme dish."

I looked at the other dishes lining the table.

The presentation was perfect.

There was no problem with the taste. In fact, it was delicious.

The fact that an automaton could do this much was truly a truth I hadn't imagined.

"… Isn't there a gap between my plate and the others?"

Only I had a larger portion.

The scrap metal looked at me, and let out a scornful laugh.

“That, of all things? I prepared a greater portion of food for my master, the chicken dickwad. I did not exceed the sum of money I was permitted, so there shouldn’t be a problem?”

There was a problem.

“Hey, you see, this is Miranda-san’s mansion. We’re just freeloaders!”

Miranda-san, who was eating alongside us, spoke.

“Ah, you don’t have to worry about that. How about it. Why not just become the master here?”

The pale green haired Miranda-san looked at me with her emerald eyes.

Her mischievous intentions were blatently visible.

She was definitely having fun.

I thought she was a cat-like person, but following the events of our previous dungeon expedition, more of her personality was showing than before.

I looked towards Novem, with her brown side ponytail.

Novem didn’t seem to be noticing my glance.

And she took a bite…

“For Lyle-sama’s preferences, the taste is a little light.”

And said that.

Hearing that, Aria let out a sigh.

The red-haired Aria directed her violet eyes at me.

“Make sure you don’t let them go too far.”

The reason Aria felt fed up was because of this piece of junk.

I mean, this pile of scraps…

“Mu! So this is the rumored『Stepmother Bullying the Young Wife』entry in my data! Are you perhaps unsatisfied with my cooking? Considering nutritional balance, I have surely created the finest of tastes.”

… Liked to compete with Novem.

I’m not even sure why, but only to Novem did she ever display an emotion like hostility.

Seeing the situation, feom the blue Jewel hung at my neck came a voice only I could hear.

The Fourth Generation Head of the Walt House,【Max Walt】had his long blue hair parted in a seven to three ration at the front, and glasses hanging on his face.

Within the Jewel, everyone had manifest in a form somewhere around their thirties.

This Fourth’s notable characteristic was… not just his glasses.

『Good grief, what a strange automaton. For her to pich a fight with Novem-chan, just what could she be thinking… now stop them already, Lyle.』

In regards to women, the Fourth was quite loud.

No, to be more specific, in regards to the treatment of women.

“Hah, scrap metal, isn’t that enough? Why are you always on at Novem?”

As the Fourth requested, I stopped the scrap metal.

But surprisingly, Novem…

“Lyle-sama, I think scrap metal is a little cruel. We’ve finally gotten ourselves a new comrade, so we’ll have to decide on a name.”

What a nice girl…

In contrast.

“For you to show mercy to the enemy… that naivety will cost you your life one day. Even if I look like this, I was manufactured as a top of the line model, and I’ve even been praised as his greatest masterpiece. I can’t be receiving mercy from…”

As she started into some incomprehensible words, Miranda-san spoke.

“Then isn’t scrap metal good enough?”

“… Chicken dickwad, I am pleading to you with upturned eyes, so please decide a worthy name for me, dammit.”

That isn’t the right attitude to ask a favor.

But only her mouth was bad, and pertaining to me, she did actually apply her all.

The housework that was hard for Novem alone had become much easier because of her, or so I’ve heard.

“… Looking at the movement of those twin tails, something’s come to mind.”

As I voiced that, scrap metal took the bait.

“Oh! For you to lust after these twin tails, you’ve got good eyes there. My makers even got into a fist fight over deciding between black bobbed hair, and these blond twin tails. As I thought, twin tails truly are the greatest.”

“I kinda get a poyo poyo feeling as the move back and forth, so【Poyopoyo】is…”[1]

The scrap metal’s refreshing expression suddenly turned expressionless.

The one who was holding her stomach in laughter… was Shannon.

In the past, she was a sightless, frail noble lady, but with her sister

being something like that, the younger sister was quite a villain in her own regard.

“You’ve got no naming sense.”

The one who extended her hand towards the giggling Shannon was Miranda-san.

She used her left hand to grab the top of her head, squeezed, and lifted her up like that.

I’m starting to hear a creaking sound.

“O-onee-sama, it hurts! It really, really hurts!”

“There’s no point in giving me that cute tone. You’re being rude to Poyopoyo, who finally received her long-awaited name.”

As she said that, Aria covered her mouth.

Only Novem continued eating while she seemed to be thinking of various things with a serious expression on her face.

“… Chicken bastard. If it’s now, I will accept a revision.”

Poyopoyo said that, so I shook my head.

“No alterations, Poyopoyo.”

The Fourth raised an angered voice from within the Jewel…

『No matter how you look at it, that’s going too far! You have to be nice to girls!』

And said something like that.

(There’s no doubt this guy’s wife subjected him to something.)

From the other’s ancestors’ conduct, I can guess he was quite a submissive husband.

This man acting up about women, was the head with the longest term of service in the Walt family’s history.

The Third fell in battle in his thirties, and so he took over the title in

his teens.

From there on, I heard he mostly contributed in domestic affairs, but…

『And wait, is there really no maintenance costs on that girl? She just sucks Lyle's Mana, right? If there's a service fee, wouldn't that be a pain? Perhaps even a normal servant maid would be better.』

He was also loud about money.

I heard he handles things on the financial front as well, but when I'm actually here conversing with him, he just keeps prattling on about money.

It seemed he was the sort of man who would choose money over women.

That was the Fourth Generation, but only concerning his wife did he ever turn frail.

His son, the Fifth spoke.

『Oy, weren't you saying something about being nice to girls? No wait, while her outside is female, her insides are iron, or something, right?』

The Fourth…

『Oh, right… but Poyopoyo is cruel.』

But yeah, perhaps Poyopoyo was a bit much.

Expressionlessly, Poyopoyo (temp) continued to grumble on about demanding a change.

"Master, won' you consider it a bit longer? Please use that meaningless godforsaken brain of yours to think of a name for my sake. I'll be sure to treasure it. If it's a proper name, I'll be sure to treasure it, so…"

Scary. This automaton is scary.

"Oy, that's a little scary, so please stop. I get it. I'll think. I'll think

about it, so please give me some more time”

As I said that, the troublesome pile of scrap metal returned a smile.

“As expected, the chicken dickwad is weak to a woman’s pressure!”

I also shot back a smile.

“Only your skin’s a woman, and your insides are black, right? How about we stop denying reality here.”

An angered scrap pile told me.

“What are you saying? As a special model of the highest grade, there is nothing impossible for me. If I was in the mood, then even a gentleman’s lustful urges are…”

After she said that much, Novem spoke.

“We’re in the middle of a meal, Poyopoyo-san.”

The scrap metal bit down on her hankerchief mortifyingly.

“T-this bitch…”

Dinner at the Circry House has become lively all of a sudden, but it’s gotten quite enervating.

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“And so, that’s why you’ve come here, is what you’re saying?”

The Library.

It was a place meant for one to drop by and store up knowledge, but today, I was reading alongside Clara.

While we read our books, we exchanged various conversations.

A while ago, I accepted the request of Damien, a famous professor of Arumsaas, the City of Scholars, and we ended up working together.

While she specialized in support, she was a skilled adventurer.

Her deep blue hair was cut around her shoulders, but perhaps she had done that herself, as the edges were quite ruffled.

It seems she liked reading books here, as whenever I came, I had quite a high probability of finding her.

I usually ask her about what books are interesting, but we would occasionally exchange such gossip.

“That’s right. That scrap metal keeps insisting I decide a name, and she competes with Novem.”

“How strange. Could her rivalry with Novem be on her job as a maid?”

I don’t know that one either.

I mean, that piece of junk… is broken.

There’s how she doesn’t remember some important things, but her tone towards me is generally terrible.

“The individual herself said her sensors labelled her as an enemy or something.”

“Well, she’s an ancient automaton, so it’s amazing enough that she can even move. Ah, come to think of it…”

Clara remembered something, and conveyed it to me.

“At the academy, Damien is moving around more automatons. He’s gotten three of them operational, and he’s confirming the situation.”

Right now Damien was the talk of the town.

Just being able to move an ancient automaton and control it was amazing in itself.

Hearing that, I thought…

“Why is it that my scrap metal is like that… should I swap it in?”

Clara responded.

“She’s properly doing her job, right? Is there some sort of problem?”

“Her choice of words, I guess? Everything else is perfect. Cleaning, laundry, and cooking, she’ll do it all.”

She really was quite perfect, but I’d like to do something about that mouth.

“Well, I think you should give up on that. I did hear it was a form of contract, and the means to sever it are as of yet unknown, so you’ll be like that all your life.”

“Please don’t make me remember those things…”

For the contract to the automaton, my own blood was needed as a catalyst.

But having just gone through a Growth, my spirits were high, and I went ahead to kiss the Automaton to activate it.

(Was that where it went wrong? No, she said she got broken of her own accord.)

“Even so…”

Clara looked at me.

“Hmm?”

“You sure do some troublesome things. Restricting your own Skills, and aiming for the labyrinth’s thirtieth floor?”

Last time when we challenged the labyrinth, we made it past the fortieth floor’s boss with but a party of six.

Apparently, it was an enemy that would usually require fifty.

And it’s good that we achieved results and all, but seeing that, the ancestors imposed a restriction of my Skills until I defeated the thirtieth floor’s boss.

Under the banner that my own abilities were overwhelmingly lacking, they forbid any such usage of any Skills in my possession.

Because of that, I somehow have to use my own strength to break through the chappence.

While it may sound easy in words, the challenge was on a scale where it required from twenty to thirty adventurers.

“It’s a personal matter. If I remain too reliant on my Skills, then it will be dangerous once my Mana runs out.”

As I expressed the ancestors’ reasoning, Clara made a slight surprised face.

“… I was sure you hadn’t noticed it, and that you were going to make a huge mistake one day. It seems I’ll have to reassess m evaluation of you, Lyle-san.”

“H-how cruel.”

As I said that, I get the feeling she was smiling a little.

“If anything happens, call out to me. With your ample funds, I don’t think I would be at a loss to hear you out.”

So it’s a matter of money, I thought… but in truth, to adventurers like us, money was essential.

In order to live, we threw ourselves into life threatening situations.

And if the money we obtained was what we used to get by, we had to be firm in that regard.

Of course, I’ve taken various things onto myself, and I’m in a standing where I have to earn enough to support two women, and one automaton.

(But really, what is it that I should to)

If we simply raised greater numbers to challenge it, then it really would be easy.

But during Damien’s request, I displayed quite a sorry sight.

(Because I returned to the guild carried by Novem, my reputation… is quite low.)

At the end of the end, I became unable to move my body, and I showed off quite a terrible state to the other adventurers.

For that reason, my own personable credibility is low.

While I want to gather the numbers, my questionable standing in Arumsaas is dragging my feet.

(As I thought, there's no choice but for me to steadily build up my own strength.)

My sudden Growth, and the fact that I produced results was all because of the Heads of History's Skills recorded in the Jewel.

If I become unable to use them, it's exceedingly troublesome.

(I'll have to think of a way to overcome the thirtieth floor.)

As I thought that, I continued to pile up the knowledge of the library.

Notes

1. Just imagine the feeling something swinging back and forth leisurely gives off

1 - Poyopoyo

Having stopped by the Arumsaas guild, I started to worry over how I was going to get the rights to challenge the labyrinth.

And I was meeting with a guild employee to confirm it, but…

“What? I already have permission?”

The disinterested clerk passed over the documents.

I get the slight feeling he was taking me for a fool.

“You cleared the labyrinth’s fortieth floor, and you’ve succeeded in completing the academy’s request, so you’re more than qualified. Did you seriously came here to ask something like that?”

The middle aged male clerk took on quite an attitude when dealing with me.

But more importantly, the other adventurers around were looking at me, and chuckling.

Today’s charge, the Sixth spoke.

『It’s that. Since you returned being dragged on the backs of women, you’re being severely underestimated.』

Arumsaas’ guild didn’t hold too good of a sentiment towards Adventurers to start with.

Even if I cleared the fortieth floor, am I still looked upon as nothing but an ordinary adventurer?

(Shouldn’t I be receiving a bit of a better treatment here?)

As I was thinking that, the staff member explained.

“You completed an academy request, and even received the additional reward. I’m in no spot to offer a complaint. It’s just that don’t forget that if the labyrinth is ever to be cleared as a whole,

you'll be the first anyone will ever suspect."

The managed labyrinth was, to the guild and the city, a mountain of treasure.

Crushing that was something to be avoided at all costs.

Only in cases where someone like Damien put out a request that seemed impossible to complete, were standard adventurers allowed to tread into the mazes.

And since I splendidly completed that request, the guild must recognize my ability.

Even when I've been recognized, the reason I don't feel happy about it at all must be this man's attitude.

"So I can go challenge the labyrinth as I please?"

"Do whatever you want. We'll have to thin out the monsters' numbers, and there are adventurers leaving here, changing their home guilds. For god's sake… please think of our standing when we have to manage it."

Adventurers arbitrarily moved away, and problems came in the labyrinth's management. Yet he's complaining to me.

The Sixth laughed.

『Arumsaas is the city of scholars, and they see adventurers as the bottom of the barrel. I see.』

That trend was there before, but academy students also registered as adventurers.

To the Arumsaas guild, adventurers were merely a necessary entity to manage the labyrinth. Perhaps they were nothing more, and nothing less.

(Isn't that why all the good adventurers run away?)

Seeing the staff member's condescending eyes, I sighed, as I felt some relief at the fact that I wouldn't have to request permission whenever I wanted to challenge the labyrinth.

Gathering numbers, submitting the paperwork, and waiting for it to be approved was quite time consuming.

“I see, Then I’ll be off with…”

Having finished my consultation, I tried to separate from the counter, but the clerk stopped me.

“Wait. There are plenty of requests for the labyrinth from the guild. I’d like it if you don’t forget to take on requests like that as well. Also, those girls… there are a number of parties that are requesting you to introduce party members Novem Forxuz and Aria Lockwarde to them. It will be for their sakes as well. There will be a banquet at some point, so make sure to drop by the guild. Oh, and if your party is disbanded, your permission to challenge the labyrinth will be revoked, but I think that would be best for you.”

Looking down on me, what’s more, he even tried to draw away my party members.

He was acting under the premise that the disbandment of my party was already inevitable.

While I may not be the most reliable, do I really deserve this much?

Hearing that, the ancestors let out their voices.

The Second…

『… Oy, oy, this guy is picking a fight with us, no, with Lyle. He’s trying to create an opportunity to recruit the party members directly from the leader.』

Perhaps it hit a nerve, but the Third laughed maniacally as he spoke.

『I wonder just who he thinks he’s provoking, huh!? Okay, Lyle… how about you give a clear denial here.』

The ancestors raged on, and I was of the complete same opinion.

The reason they’re calling out to Novem and the rest is likely because the impression that everyone who participated in the request besides me were prodigious was large.

In truth, Novem was excellent as a magician, and her focus was on healing.

Aria was a Vanguard with multiple Skills, and considering her age, she had good future prospects.

(I've heard there are many adventurers who come to Arumsaas to gather comrades, but this is too blunt, is it not?)

I spoke to the condescending clerk.

"And they'll even use the guild as an intermediary to recruit them? I'll have to refuse."

"… It's a measure so as not to waste those girls' talents. Among those calling out to them are young nobles as well."

It seems while they were harsh on adventurers, the city of scholars was kind to nobles.

The Fourth spoke.

『This is clear favoritism, isn't it? The guild is supposed to be an equal opportunity organization. On the surface, at least.』

"You're lacking a little in the fairness department there. If they want to call out to us, then won't you please tell them that I'd prefer them not to use the guild as an intermediary to threaten us?"

When I said that with a smile, the clerk responded in an irritated fashion.

"You ignorant brat…"

The Sixth whispered.

『Even when Lyle received a present from that Damien, and got him to actually remember his name. This is getting interesting.』

A grinning image of the Sixth floated in my mind, and I started speaking with that very same grin.

"The truth is in this request, I become quite acquainted with Damien. I've even gotten around to dropping by his laboratory on occasion.

He must have taken quite a liking to me… I mean, he's given me one of his automatons."

"W-what are you…"

The guild had weak knees when it came to the academy.

Like that, upon hearing the name of a famous professor, the man suddenly became flustered.

His eyes were darting around the room in an amusing fashion.

"You can confirm it if you want, you know? I mean, we're comrades who overcame the fortieth floor together."

The Seventh offered me some advice.

『Fumu. I also dislike adventurers, but these sorts are an eyesore… if you want to crush them, it's best to do it quickly. Lyle, How about telling Damien. 『My comrades are being taken away, and they won't be able to stop by the laboratory anymore』 or so.』

The Fifth agreed.

『This guy's probably not the only one, but he'll make for a nice example.』

It was Novem and Aria being scouted away, and not Poyopoyo, though…

As I thought that, I noticed.

(I see, so I can make him misunderstand that Poyopoyo is being recruited.)

While it was an underhanded method, the opposing side already resorted to that.

Of all else, if I think about what's to come, these sorts of talks may keep springing up one after another.

(That girl can't be registered as an adventurer, but can I count her into my fighting force?)

I doubt that toxic maid is strong, but that doesn't change the fact that she's a comrade.

"Let's see. How about I have a little chat… the truth is, the guild is persistently aiding in having my comrades recruited off, and it's troublesome."

As I said that, he cast his eyes down.

Perhaps out of panic, he had broken out into a sweat.

The Sixth spoke.

『These sorts see all adventurers as the same. They look down on them, and think that they can say whatever they want… he probably acted with his usual attitude against Lyle.』

The Fourth spoke.

『I don't think he had plans to pick a fight. He's truly thinking for Novem-chan and the others' sakes, or so he's deluded himself. But yep… we'll need to make someone an example.』

I'll bet Arumsaas doesn't have nothing but these sorts of clerks.

But it's true that the trend is strong.

(Good grief… Hawkins-san had never seemed so dazzling before.)

I remembered the clerk in the city that treated everyone with care, Hawkins-san. Having come here, I've really experienced the differences in a guild's atmosphere.

"… T-this time, well, they've insisted no matter what…"

As he started giving an excuse, I smiled.

"That's no good, isn't it? Well then, I have some matters to attend to at the academy."

Saying that, I left the guild. I took along Poyopoyo, who had been stationed outside, and headed towards the academy.

Poyopoyo spoke.

“For a god damn chicken, you’re quite the brutish master. His face was pale, you know. For you to pressure a human much weaker than you to that extent… simply shameful.”

She touched her hand to her mouth, and started smiling as she said that.

“You’re saying that knowing fully well, aren’t you? And wait, powerwise, they have a higher authority than me. Aren’t I the weaker side here!?”

Poyopoyo’s expression suddenly turned serious.

“Of course I know. I did hear the conversation, and all. You’re going to go to professor Damien for help, or something. As expected of a chicken dickwad. You know full well how to make use of your friends.”

Should I change my evaluation of Damien to a friend?

As I worried, the Second spoke.

『Well that is the truth. But at times like this, you’ve got to aid one another.』

The Third as well.

『That’s right. Lyle is sooperating with Damien, so this much is fine. Oh, you’re going to be using Damien, so you’ll have to listen to his requests to an extent here on.』

Yes, it definitely was going in a direction where I would be using him.

I need to offer some compensation.

(But all of Damien’s favors seem really troublesome.)

Pulling Poyopoyo along, I increased my gait as I headed towards the academy.

When we arrived at the academy, me and Poyopoyo found automatons hurriedly moving around the lab.

Behind his desk, Damien sat deep into his chair as he looked at us.

“Whew! Those ancients sure were amazing. They made dolls this elaborate; laundry and cleaning and even cooking is done to perfection. At this point, they’re too useful to part with.”

Taking off his glasses, and wiping the lenses, Damisn spoke with a heartfelt tone.

“The fact that you activated them means… could it be…”

I looked at Damien, but the answer was…

“I just used my blood normally. Oh my~ this man’s first kiss is saved up for the ideal woman he’s going to be building. Still, the Lyle of that time was a grace from god. My research has advanced leaps and bounds.”

As he directed an innocent smile at me, I could respond with nothing but, ‘I see.’

“Hmm, having partaken in master’s first kiss, I’m nothing like those mass-produced defects over there. As I thought, I’m special!”

As Poypoyo’s mood improved, the other automatons stopped to look at us. Their black pupils gave off red flashes…

“As expected of a ‘special’ model. That instability and speech will only be a burden on her master.”

“Exactly. As a maid… no, as an automaton, she’s a failure.”

“Did you know? Mass produced models are made to the ideals of all men. Special models are but… pff…”

The black haired bob cut maids directed smiles at us as they said such things.

It’s surprising that these are actually dolls.

Their conversations were well directed, and they could do

housework better than most women. Looking at Poyopoyo, Aria had become teary on multiple occasions.

“From my point of view, whether they be mass produced, or worked on individually, the breasts are…”

Damien shook his head.

“So you don’t have any more questions for Poyopoyo today?”

The reason we came to the academy was also because Damien was curious of her progress.

The other awakened automatons were mass produced models, and Poyopoyo alone was special.

Damien had wanted information from her, but…

“This time’s the last one. She can do housework fine, and while there’s a problem with her speech, it’s coherent. She seems to direct harsh remarks at you in particular, but she’s serving her master as an automaton should, so there’s no real problem. If you’re looking for some flaws in her specs, I guess it would have to be her memory? None of the automatons know any of the important things. There’s the fact they were just activated, but it’s as if something essential was disconnected… more importantly, what the hell is Poyopoyo? Is that a name?”

Damien looked at Poyopoyo.

He squatted on the spot, and made an irritated gesture.

“It’s fine. Until this chicken dickhead comes up with a worthy name, I have chosen to accept the designation of Poyopoyo! Right! Until this dickhead comes up with a worthy name, you hear!”

I spoke to Damien, as I traced my face with my finger.

“I couldn’t think of one, so I just kinda went with the flow? Something like that?”

The other three automatons looked at Poyopoyo, and…

“H-he gave you a name, you say!?”

“Even when our master only calls us【No. 1】,【No. 2】, and【No. 3】!”

“No, we haven’t lost the battle! Never has he once mixed up our designated numbers!”

With her head hanging down, Poyopoyo was grinning widely.

“Hmhmhm, mass produced defects. This is the power of a special model.”

(I would have preferred a mass produced one. Even so…)

Even when all three of them looked exactly the same, Damien was able to tell them apart.

As expected of the perverted professor of the seven great.

“A name, you say… I’ll have to think of one for my ideal woman too. Oh, right, that matter with the guild.”

As if he had just remembered it, Damien put my request to mouth.

The case of the guild trying to recruit.

I had told him about it.

“Right. Can I ask it of you?”

“I don’t really mind. And wait, there are plenty of complaints about the guild. I have a mountain of things I want to mouth off to them, but… yeah, I’ll convey the message.”

I had a bit of a questionable feeling. Perhaps noticing that, the Sixth called out.

『That clerk would have gotten a grudge on himself, and self-destructed on his own sooner or later. He simply coincidentally got himself involved with you. It’s your loss if you want to mull over it.』

To indicate my affirmation, I gripped the Jewel.

“That’s a life saver. Now then, the compensation for this time’s visit can be called even with this request.”

“Really? My research funds are quickly going up in smokes, so that’s

a relief.”

After that, I chatted with Damien a bit before leaving the lab.

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When I returned to the mansion, I found Shannon washing dishes under Novem’s direction.

I heard Shannon’s scream from the kitchen, and I dropped by to witness quite a peculiar scene unfolding.

“No~ please forgive me already!”

“That won’t do. Miranda-san also told me to teach you properly. Now, once the dishes are sparkling, we’re moving onto the cleaning the room.”

“Ah, Lyle! Don’t just stand there, and help me! It’s freaking scary! Novem’s really scary!”

She ran at me with the intentions of embracing me, so I stopped her by holding my hand out against her head.

Her arms kept going back and forth, but her hands were never to reach me.

“It’s merely reaping what you sow. As punishment for you kicking back and relaxing all these years, isn’t this too light?”

In the end, Miranda-san forgave Shannon.

After that harsh personality divide… even after Shannon created her darker side, her surface face ended up forgiving her.

Seeing the scene, the Sixth raised a doubtful voice.

『For me to have seen this girl overlapping with Milleia…』

The Fifth was of the same opinion.

『We were too wary, but it ended out fine. As long as Miranda stays close, she’ll be rehabilitated soon enough.』

Novem looked at me.

“Welcome home, Lyle-sama. And… Poyopoyo-san.”

With a troubled expression on her face, Novem voiced the scrap pile’s temporary name.

“I don’t recall giving you permission to address me by name! What’s moire, you’re just doing what you please in my territory… prepare yourself!”

“You’re being noisy.”

After I hit the back of her head, her twintails swayed back and forth before she fell face first onto the ground.

She covered the spot I hit with both hands as she looked at me.

“That hurt, chicken bastard. Please treat me with more care. I’m quite a delicate maiden. When my master gets angry at me, I end up weeping to myself in the middle of the night.”

“… That’s scary, so please stop it. And wait, are you still awake at night? What do you do at that time?”

Brimming with confidence, Poyopoyo…

“I’m on standby in sleep mode! I always make sure to take in that strange energy called Mana from Master, so I have to economize my battery life as much as… ow!”

I hit the top of her head with my palm again.

“So you’re sleeping, are you not!? Are you really an automaton!?”

Novem looked upon our exchange, and smiled.

“You two really do get along.”

I looked at Poyopoyo.

She looked a little happy, and it was irritating.

“As I thought, you really did lust after me, chicken dickwad. If only you ever called for me, I would terminate sleep mode, and in your

bed… ow…”

I smacked her head again, and felt a sense of fatigue.

Shannon, who was being pinned down by me…

“Hey, how long am I going to be pinned like this!? Isn’t you guys’ treatment of me much too bad!?”

From the Jewel, I heard the Fifth and Sixths’ voices.

『She’s on small fry level.』

『Yeah~ This girl is…』

Really, just what part of this child were we feeling danger from again?

2 - Various Worries

… Aria Lockwarde was worried.

She had become an adventurer and joined a party, but was her current self truly contributing…?

She had borrowed the Circry mansion's yard, and was swinging her spear, but her impatience made the head feel heavy, and it wouldn't move as she wanted it.

As her sweaty hands let the portion she clenched slip, she decided to take a break to get her breathing back together.

"Hah, hah… I'm the only one being left behind."

Her party members consisted of Lyle and Novem, who were a year her junior, and the automaton Poyopoyo, who's name had yet to be finalized. The four of them(?).

At this point, if they asked Clara or Miranda, they would probably lend a hand as well.

And within them, Aria was panicking on her own.

She thought she was properly accomplishing her job as a vanguard, but for some reason, the atmosphere was one where she was the only one growing distant.

Lyle had a lot of loose ends to him, but he did rack up achievements.

You could understand it if you ever saw him up close.

He could use multiple Skills simultaneously, and he easily mastered their use.

Even when she had a red gem as well, she would never be able to use it like Lyle.

Support and Vanguard Class Skills were different.

But in regards to handling them, it was clear as day that Aria fell behind the boy.

She could use magic as well, but nothing on the high level of Novem's.

The times where the Lockwarde House was heralded as a Viscount House were but a distant memory.

Rather than practicing magic in order to live, she had been worry over how to get through the days.

Even if she took up jobs to support herself, her father's money usage always left the House baren.

At the end, she was seriously giving thought to selling off her body.

No matter what she did, it was pointless…

She remembered her father's voice.

He was a prideful man, and he hated adventurers.

If they ever even came out in conversation, he would lash out, and he was always bringing troubles.

"… Just what am I even doing?"

Regretfully, Aria knew the extent of her own ability.

Whether she fought up front, or cast magic in the back, she would never match up to either Lyle, or Novem.

Unlike the two of them, who wholeheartedly devoted their youths to training their martial arts and magics, a large gap had opened up.

Aria gripped the red gem hanging at her neck.

Of the Skills recorded in it, there were four in total.

Her own Skill…【Quick】included, the number became five.

While Quick allowed for swift consecutive movements, its burden on the body was high.

It was the Skill she had obtained on her own, so it wasn't a struggle for her to use it. Compared to the other Skills she had, that is.

Strengthen one's muscles, strengthen one's weapons, let loose a single strong attach, send out a shockwave.

If you looked at the other Skills, they were all a lineup any vanguard adventurer would look upon with envy.

In the past, an adventurer she met in Dalien had told her…

"Skill affinity, is it…"

For good or bad, all a gem did was record Skills, and as it arbitrarily recorded them, it was quite a pain.

In that case, using Magic Tools bestowed with Skills was the preferable option.

Essential combinations… raising one's own strength, and reducing the enemies. If those two Skills were to be put together, then high level enemies could be taken down.

I mean, it acted to raise your abilities, and lower the oppositions.

That difference could become a wide one.

Gems had one major defect.

"But I can't use Magic Tools, and the current me can't afford one… in the end, I'll have to master this thing, or else."

Looking at the red gem, she let out a sigh.

She tried to wipe her seat off of her body, but it stuck, and when she took a rest, she got the feeling she had a slight fever.

This time, the clothes stuck down to her started to make her feel nauseous.

The walls around the yard were high, and no one could peep in, so Aria removed her upper layer.

"Even my underwear is sticky."

Her clothes had taken up enough sweat that they could be wrung out.

Spear in hand, she moved to head back to the inside.

When she went to the door into the mansion, Poyopoyo emerged, carrying a basket.

“Oh, my, so you were in the middle of training. You’re dripping sweat, so please don’t come any closer. I have my precious master’s washed laundry here.”

The bad-mouthed automaton treated Lyle as her master, but other humans were given a fixed level of treatment.

Only Novem was an exception.

“… You sure treat Lyle different from everyone else.”

As Aria said that, Poyopoyo responded with a serious face.

“What of it? I have become operational in order to serve my master. I must apologize, but everyone else is just an extra? Ah, but… if master told me to serve Aria-san like my life depended on it, then I do plan on serving you with such resolve. However, do remember my loyalty if saved for no one but that chicken dickwad…”

As Aria felt fed up at Poyopoyo’s long speech, she looked at her with tired eyes.

“Fine by me. Even so, why is it that women just keep on gathering around that man one after another…”

What she remembered were the events that transpired before she came to Arumsaas.

On a night with a pretty full moon, Lyle had confessed in a roundabout way by saying, ‘the moon sure is beautiful tonight,’ or something of thie light. Aria’s face turned red.

And to her, Poyopoyo…

“You’re in the way, so can’t you move? You’re shortening the time I have left to dry the laundry. And wait, you reek of sweat, so why not

dunk a bucket of cold water over yourself?”

Aria looked at Poyopoyo.

“… I think I hate you.”

Poyopoyo responded.

“What a coincidence. I have no interest in anyone besides that damn chicken. Oh, that woman is another matter entirely!”

It wasn’t a coincidence or anything, she simply wasn’t interested. Aria passed by her, and entered the mansion.

While she was a strange automaton, she did all the housework to perfection.

It was on a level where complaining about it was unreasonable.

“Really, just why did you have to wake this strange girl… idiot.”

While turning her eyes to the automaton hanging clothing up in the yard, Aria muttered that…

❼

Having come to the library, I was reading books pertaining to adventurers.

I was mostly confirming the organization of a Party.

“… If we’re going to have four fighters, we’ll have to have the same, or a greater number of support.”

In order to conquer Arumsaas’s labyrinth, I was thinking of how to go about not using Skills.

The first I thought of was gathering numbers, a simple, and exemplary answer.

But to do that, I would have to gather personnel I could trust as my comrades.

We came to Arumsaas to search for comrades to begin with.

The very fact that we hadn't made much progress on that one made me determine that method would take much too long.

"It's fine to take time, but the problem is…"

… During that period, I won't be able to use and Skills.

It's not like they're necessary for me to move as I want.

But as the item I had relied on to now had become unusable, I had to obtain a new power for myself.

It's natural for me to be training myself, and for acting as a party, I needed to obtain the necessary technique.

"Confirming our own location within the labyrinth… Also, scouting, confirming and disarming traps, as well as securing safety… the Fifth and Sixth's Skills are way too convenient."

Having lost the areas those Skills compensated for, I was immediately inconvenienced.

The Second spoke.

『Their Skills are extraordinary as a set. While convenient individually, I'm surprised they manifested a set like that.』

Different Skills manifest based on the individual.

Even if you had identical twins, it's not certain that the same Skill will come out.

The individuals' growth and desires, and other such factors influence it, or so I've read.

Aiming for and trying to get a specific one to emerge is exceedingly difficult.

"To compensate for this, I'll need a specialist… learning it on my own is impossible."

The learning part in itself isn't a problem.

If I tried, I think I could do it, and I'm sure it's possible, but… the time necessary to pick it up, and to learn all the other necessary skills would add on time in units of years.

If possible, I don't want to stretch it out that long.

Once we fortified our party in Arumsaas, I was planning on heading to the capital of adventurers, the free city of【Beim】.

Celes… there's also the matter with my sister the First Generation called a monster, and staying in one place for too long is likely dangerous.

(For that whimsical Celes, I wonder just when her interests will become directed at me… no, I also get the feeling she may have forgotten.)

With her willfulness, I can't even imagine what she'll be doing next.

Back when my parents still got along with me…

(Huh? What sort of girl was Celes again?)

Looking back, it's a memory of when I was ten.

I treated my sister Celes as an older brother should. That's how it should have been. I have no memories of doing anything particular to be hated.

The mansion just suddenly started to move with her at its center…

I shook my head, and put those thoughts on hold.

(Is is her Skill? Or could it be something else… No, let's put that aside.)

I turned my eyes back to the book, and tried to think of another formation for the party that wouldn't rely on my Skills.

❼

… Novem was inspecting the room after Shannon had cleaned it.

“I see, so she really does have good eyes. She’s cleaned up quite nicely. I’ll have to praise her later.”

The individual herself would probably hate it though, Novem thought, as she turned to leave the room. But there, she heard a voice.

While she had erased her presence to approach, Novem knew, so she wasn’t surprised.

… It was Miranda.

“Hmm, where’s Shanon?”

“She’s in the yard with Poyopoyo-san right now. They’re taking in the laundry. Welcome back, Miranda-san.”

While looking at Novem’s radiant smile, Miranda returned a smile of her own.

“I see. I came to watch her working hard. How unfortunate.”

Novem realized Miranda had intentionally tried erasing her presence. She also knew it wasn’t in order to scare Shannon.

Miranda had approached, knowing fully well Novem was the only one there.

“… Did you have some business with me?”

As Novem tried asking for her main intent, Miranda revised her expression.

She took on a serious face. She had been hiding them under her academy uniform, but behind, her back, two daggers…

While wondering why she was being so wary today, Novem treated her as usual.

“I had a few questions.”

“Questions, is it? I have a few of those myself.”

A tense air emerged between the two, but neither of them seemed to mind it. If either of them made any movements, Shannon’s room

would soon become a battlefield, or so the air seemed to indicate.

What Miranda wanted to ask about was Novem herself.

“Shannon told me. That you don’t seem to be human… but it sure is strange. You don’t look like an automaton either. Those things had just become famous when our professor activated them not to long ago. You seem to have grown up alongside Lyle…”

Hearing Miranda change her way of addressing him from Lyle-kun to Lyle, Novem was overjoyed.

In order to truly build up a harem for Lyle, she thought it would be best to get a hold of Miranda no matter what.

“I am Novem of the Forxuz House. Nothing more, and nothing less. Having people fear me… it’s always been like that, and I don’t think I’ve ever been too mindful of it.”

Seeing Novem tilting her head, Miranda leaned herself against the door frame, and mutter, ‘that so?’

(She still has her guard up.)

And Novem brought up the topic she wanted to ask about.

“My homeland, the Forxuz House has had quite a long relation with the Walt House. I know from that connection, but… the Circry House is linked to the Walt house as well, right? You should have met with them numerous times at Centralle.”

About the Walt House… about Celes.

As far as Novem knew, when Lyle had surpassed the age of ten, Celes began receiving treatment fitting of the next head of the House.

It was also a rumor that the social gatherings were attended by the beautiful woman of the Walt’s.

Even now, the Walt House held a major influence.

If they were ever called to a party in Centralle, it wouldn’t be strange for the related houses to never get into contact with them.

“Asking when you already know… that’s right, I knew about Lyle already as well. I was surprised when I found him with Aria, but it’s true that I was a little interested in him.”

Novem gave a high evaluation to Miranda, who wasn’t fascinated with Celes despite meeting her.

“I see. You could have informed his House, but why didn’t you?”

Miranda raised both of her hands in a pose of surrender.

“If I moved in that direction, I was sure you would kill both me and Shannon.”

While thinking how savage of a misunderstanding that, was, Novem offered a correction.

“Oh, I would never go that far. We would just leave this place. Even so, even when she did that much to you, you sure do treasure your little sister.”

Miranda’s gaze lowered just a little.

“With her lack of vision, you see, Shannon received quite a harsh treatment… As a family member, I want to protect her. I knew of her resentment, but that’s just because I was recognized by that woman instead of her.”

That woman definitely meant Celes, thought Novem, as she muttered.

“You sure are nice.”

“It’s because we’re sisters. Well, we don’t get along too well with the second or third daughters.”

It seems Miranda’s sisters had some complicated circumstances. Novem had a vague understanding of that from the fact that the first daughter Miranda was in a place like thi.

“… As long as you don’t lay a hand on Lyle-sama, then I won’t do a thing. Ah, but… I won’t stop you if you try getting along with as man and woman. I did hear it was love at first sight.”

Hearing that, Miranda burst out.

“Y-you were awake!”

Seeing Novem’s smile, Miranda left with a reddened face. Perhaps she was angry, as her steps were louder than usual. It felt as if she was intentionally making sound as she walked.

More human feelings than before were emerging.

Rather than the Miranda who could only ever be a good person, Novem liked the current one.

“I’m a littls envious.”

Saying that, Novem also exited Shannon’s room…

❼

Having finished reading the materials at the library, I walked down Arumsaas’ streets.

I had committed a few points to strengthen a party to mind, so I was going to return to consult Novem, and everyone and the ancestors to see if we could realize them.

Doing nothing but think about it made my head feel heavy, so I took a recreational walk on the way back.

There were quite a few academy students, and they carried a different impression about them than the standard civilians walking about.

It wasn’t the city of scholars for nothing, and the treasuring of wisdom was deeply rooted in their culture, I’ll bet.

Of course, it’s also true that the city was mocked for having to culture to begin with.

On the street.

“You don’t even know something as simple as that? Even children

know it.”
“W-what!?”

Most of the conversations I heard were something like that. Proud of their wisdom, there were many people who spoke ill of those less learned than them.

It’s true it was an interesting place, but I’m doubtful of whether I want to stay ehre forever.

I mean, the city itself is a mashed up jumble, and if I had a say in this, I’d like a quiet and peaceful place to set up house.

With a wife, and some children, and…

(Huh? It’s getting a little hard to imagine.)

The happy end of a story has to be where the protagonist is heralded as a hero. Or perhaps living happily ever after alongside his companion.

I had longed for the latter, but I can’t even imagine it at this point.

(Well, for now, I just have to think about clearing the thirtieth lower level.)

I’ll be able to think of such things later, I thought, as I switched gears, and continued walking.

Arumsaas’ good point was that there were few ill-breds to be found. To put it another way, there were very few dangerous spots.

There wasn’t a place for gambling, and with all the book stores and private schools and training halls, it didn’t seem there was much in the way of pleasure.

It was forbidden for performers to put on acts on the streets, so unless there was a festival going on, that sort of fun was little to be found.

When asked, it seems this city’s concept of fun was drinking the night away in a bar while listening to the music. There were places like that in Dalien as well.

If you want to put it bluntly, while the city's scale was massive, there wasn't any fun.

"That's why the adventurers are leaving one after another. Well, there are some that like this place as well, but… there's no place for me to really use money."

It may be the best for those that want to polish themselves, but it was nothing but a boring place for adventurers with a bit of ability to them.

That was Arumsaas. The City of Scholars.

But at the same time, I though…

"I don't actually have any hobbies, do I."

Swordplay and magic were necessities, so I honed them.

Books are there to store up knowledge. No, it's not like I hate reading, but… I noticed that apart from that, I didn't have anything that I could call a hobby.

Hobbies were a necessity to enjoy life, or so I read in a book.

I turned onto a street with fewer passersby, and muttered to myself.

"I wonder if I should get a hobby."

The Fourth.

『To all onlookers, it probably looks like your hobby is fooling around with women. Well, it's nice to have one. I loved counting the gold coins piled up in the vault.』

That's a hobby? As I thought that, the Fifth spoke.

『… I used up all the Fourth's money on my mistresses.』

He said it! The Fifth let out some rare emotions, but…

『The hell ya' doing, ya' bastard!!』

The money loving Fourth flipped out.

(In the past, I would have to worry over a Mana expenditure like this, but recently, I haven't been minding it at all)

I remembered the past, where I would immediately collapse, and thought I didn't want to experience Growth for something like this.

I heard voices from the Jewel.

『Shut up!! It was necessary for me to resolve the problems you left behind! When I became the head, we did fight a lot, though!』

As the Fifth shouted back, the Sixth tried to calm him.

While the Sixth gave off a wild impression, he was weak in some places to the Fifth.

『Let's calm down, everyone. If you calmly explain it, I'm sure he'll understand.』

The Seventh spoke.

『Ah, so it's about that matter. That really was a problem raised by the Fourth. The Third was also related, but there's no point in telling the man who died in battle.』

The Third let out his voice.

『… Did I do something?』

The Fifth spoke in a low voice.

『You didn't do anything. Because you didn't do anything about it, it became such a large issue. And because of that, I…』

It seems that there are various problems between the generations of the Walt House.

(I wonder just what happened.)

It was a topic I was a little curious about, so I planned to ask about it when I got back.

ProofReader/Edited by Zehamas

Make sure you guys keep giving Yoraikun some words of

encouragement for his midterms! The Divines knows he needs it!

3 - The Lifeform Known as a Feudal Lord.

『I was an only child.』

Within a gloomy atmosphere, the Fifth started talking.

Within the Jewel, everyone from the Second up was sitting around, and listening to him. Only the Fourth was acting awkward, as he incessantly pushed his glasses up and down.

The Second…

『Not happenin'. That ain't happenin'.』

He looked towards the Fourth with quite a stiff face.

The Third spoke.

『I was the second child, but brother died, so I became the heir. I think I explained that, right?』

All of us directed our eyes at the Fourth.

Unable to bear it, he finally opened his mouth.

『M-my wife was still quite young. See, when we were first introduced, she was still in her early teens. Even when I was in my thirties… our ages were separate enough for us to be parent and child.』

As he moved to make an excuse, the Sixth responded.

『Yeah, so?』

The Seventh too.

『And?』

The group that didn't care about such age differences continued to pressure him.

The Second was more concerned about the fact that his eldest son had died.

『And wait, before thinking about raising the Fifth safely, shouldn't you have considered the possibility of his death? It's not rare for our like to fall in skirmishes and other petty squabbles of the like.』

The Fourth raised a powerless voice.

『No, I am repenting it, but after the Third fell, his majesty, you see, he kinda called out to me and…』

According to the Fourth's explanation, the family began to receive preferential treatment on various fronts due to the Third's achievements. No one would think of directly opposing the family the crown felt a sense of debt to.

And during the Fourth's time, they were able to use those merits to rise to Baron status.

The Third threw down his life for the crown, and contributed to his victory, so the Walt House began to receive the treatment of a sort of direct vassal to the throne of Bahnseim.

The Seventh spoke.

『The Third died young, so there's no helping the fact the Fourth didn't have any siblings. But the Fifth being an only child means…』

IT wasn't just for diplomacy through marriage, but if they wanted to build up favorable relations, it would be best to have a brother, or sister, or two. If there was a branch family there to support the Walt House that had suddenly expanded in scope, the Fifth's position may have been firmer cemented.

"It's that, I see. He was called the manwhore of the family, but it was actually for the House's sake."

As I said that, the Fifth nodded.

『That's right. Even I only wanted to have a single wife. It sounded easier. And also… do you think I could love all my children equally when I had numbers surpassing thirty? There were some sons I sent

out to harsh environments. There was even a daughter I sent in place of a hostage.』

The Fourth's time was nice.

The royal family looked out for him, and I've heard that the king was the one who found a bride for him.

But once that ruler stepped down, it seems the timespan before the Fourth retired was terrible.

『I can't trust any one of them. All of the nobles around kept trying to pick fights. There were even times they impersonated bandits to raze my villages.』

A blue vein popped up on the Second's forehead.

『You did get back at them, right? You didn't leave them looking down on you, right?』

There, the Sixth spoke.

『During my era, we somehow able to put the surrounding powers on the defensive, and we were able to begin our offense,.』

The Fifth's time…

No, in the time from Third to Fourth, it seems there were few reliable retainers to be found. During that time, the Forxuz House didn't betray, and remained loyal… did they not have ambition?

The Fourth's excuse…

『No, look… from my side, I couldn't find a wife because of those strange precepts.』

As their status had only just risen, the Walt House would have to have taken in the daughter of one of the same rank, or one higher.

But when the Fourth stepped down, the surrounding Viscount Houses had built some distance from them.

『If I had any siblings, it would have turned out differently.』

As the Fifth stared at him intently, the Fourth shut his mouth.

The Third spoke.

『That shouldn't be. She was still able to give birth, right? And wait, what about the possibility of a mistress? You were a Baron House, right? How about welcoming in an illegitimate from the surrounding houses as a second wife? You had plenty of options, didn't you?』

The Fourth…

『No~ my wife was a bit of a crybaby, and…』

『Don't screw with me, you bastard!!』

AS the Fifth jumped at the Fourth, no one moved to stop him. More so, they seemed to think it natural for him to be hit.

I did have knowledge of these sorts of matters, to an extent. In truth, when the adequate age came, it wasn't strange to be arbitrarily married off, or something of the sort.

I didn't have time for that, so I never really thought of marriage.

Just getting my parents to turn my way… that's all that was on my mind.

The Second took charge of the situation.

『Let's put the man punching his father aside, and just leave it as we successfully made connections with the surrounding area. We married them into our family, or sent off brides and grooms to them… Since our lineage was a good one, I doubt they had any complaints.』

The fact that they were getting well-disciplined children of good lineage was probably a good thing for the other side as well. It's not like there's no problem about it, but for the Walt House that hadn't an ally to be found around it, it was a firm way to stabilize itself.

The Sixth spoke.

『They were all of reliable lineage. The problem's was the inclination the house started to take. When he crushed other opposing houses,

he would gather women who had no crimes themselves. He'd investigate, and call them over… no matter how much money we had, it wasn't enough.』

It seems he expended quite a sum of money, but the Fourth's stock was able withstand that. Just how much did he save up, anyways?

Out of breath, the Fifth took his seat again. The Fourth corrected his glasses before sitting as well. His clothes were torn up, but he didn't seem to be injured.

(Well, it's not like they're living flesh or anything.)

Inside the Jewel… I'm in a state where I've brought nothing but my consciousness into here.

And the ancestors were nothing more than memories. Their memories retained their hearts, or so the premise seems to be.

(Just how was a gem like this made?)

If it was just going to record Skills, then a method like this would be unnecessary. To me, hearing them talking all at once isn't really a problem, but a normal person would probably have gone insane by now.

I was on the verge a couple of times. But how many years has it been since I've found embarrassment from being teased by my relatives?

『I had no affection for any of them. Birth my children. That's all I wish for, I proclaimed.』

With a mournful tone, the Fifth said that.

I thought he was nothing but a cold person, but it seems he did think back on it.

And…

『My first son frickin' went out to become a delinquent, and the fights among siblings just wouldn't come to an end, and… the only thing I had to sooth me was my pets.』

“Um, I think the Fifth just broke.”

I remember the events that transpired in Dalien.

There was a monster with the form of a rabbit.

Every time I took one down, he screamed out to stop me. While I was thinking of how strange his tastes were, the Sixth shouted out over being labelled a delinquent.

『If you’ve got over thirty younger brothers and sisters, of course, you’d race out towards delinquency! What’s more, you doted on your pets more than you children… did you know, Lyle?』

“What is it?”

『The Fifth was feeding a young divine beast called a Qilin.』

The Fifth responded.

『Oy, don’t call it feeding, or something low like that. That one was my family!』

The Third spoke.

『Why not treasure your original family first?』

I put my hand to my chin, and tried to remember.

Qilin… a horned, scaled horse-like creature. They’re also called dragon mares, but to differentiate them from monsters, they were often classified as divine beasts.

Before Magic Tools made their appearances, divine beasts were the aspiration of nobles. Qilins, fabled to even be able to run across the sky were said to make an entire clan prosper for generations to come if you owned one.

There are even knights who’ve dueled over the ownership’s of them.

For the Fifth to have had one…

“Huh? But if it was a young one, then isn’t it strange that I didn’t see it at the mansion? Divine beasts are blessed with longevity, or so I’ve

read.”

A hundred years or two was normal for them. The one who was feeding… no, raising that beast, the Fifth, smiled.

『It’s because it was injured… after treating it, and getting its strength back, I naturally returned it back to nature. Its comrades from its herd came to reclaim it… that one, at the end, it gazed so regretfully at me… even when I urged it to go out already, it kept looking this way.』

Upon seeing the Fifth break out into tears, everyone present drew back.

The Sixth shouted out.

『Can you even understand my feelings!? Everyone suddenly placed expectations on me when my old man got himself a Qilin, and you went off and returned it to nature… how do you think I felt when I heard that!? You could have presented it to the royals! Just keeping it around would be enough.』

Having such a rare animal would have been beneficial for the Walt House’s sake…

I also drew back at the Sixth’s words.

The Fourth looked at the Fifth as he spoke.

『Oy, you… you’re the worst.』

『As if you should be the one to say that!!』

『And that’s your fault, isn’t it!!』

Seeing the Fourth and Sixth shout at one another, I whispered to the Seventh seated beside me.

“So, who exactly is at fault here?”

『… I don’t really want to say it, but it’s the responsibility of the late Third Generation. It’s because of that man that the Walt left their names in history, but at the same time, their sudden rise in status increased the scope of the House’s authority just as suddenly. Well,

if you're asking who was in the wrong… pretty much everyone.』

Problems left by the parents were solved by the children.

That's what these heads of history put to practice.

Looking at them made some sorrowful feelings surface, but at the same time…

"It's that. Every era has its problems."

『Right. There were quite a few in my time, you know… You may have it easy, but the Walt House is right in the center of a mountain of problems right now.』

Hearing that from the Seventh, I tilted my heads, and wondered whether that was true.

As I failed to comprehend it, the Second spoke to me with a fed up expression.

『Lyle, you may have been driven out of the house, but the Walt House currently has a ticking timebomb in its midst known as Celes… isn't that a huge problem?』

I was satisfied with that answer. I guess there is a number of things I'm not seeing as well.

(… But isn't it fine to leave Celes as is? I mean, I'm leaving the country, and all.)

Am I being much too naïve?

❼

Having challenged Arumsaas' labyrinth, I took along Aria, Novem and Clara.

This expedition was just to check how far the four of us could go alone. We came with the intention of spending three days, and two nights.

“Lyle-san, there is a party of adventurers trailing us from behind.”

“Eh? Why?”

As I strained my ears, just as Clara said, I heard the sound of footsteps from behind.

“Perhaps they’re under the assumption we are taking the shortest route? I mean, we did make it all the way to the fortieth floor and back in a week. It isn’t strange for them to think we have a Skill like that on us.”

It isn’t the best of feelings.

Trailing us from behind was, in the first place, a breach of manners.

Even if we ask the perpetrators, they’ll likely something like they were coincidentally choosing the same path at us. Their excuse was so clear, I could already see it.

Also, if they followed behind us, they would be able to avoid battle.

It’s a form of harassment within the labyrinth.

Aria opened her mouth.

“What should we do? We’re trying to see how far we can get with the four of us, right? Should we convey the message that we’re not using Skills?”

Clara shook her head.

“It’s best not to get involved with adventurers who know full well they’re not following the proper conduct. In the worst case, they might attacking us.”

Within the labyrinth, adventurers could kill one another.

It was a common story. They lie in wait for those that were returning after slaying hordes of monsters, and snatch their earnings off of them. Those sorts of people definitely existed.

Of course, adventurers who dived really deep in…

Had a high likelihood of meeting them on the way back up.

As I kept watch of behind, Novem raised her voice.

“Lyle-sama, footsteps from the front.”

I immediately reached for the mace at my hips as I looked ahead. Clara was lighting the way, but all I saw was a few monsters moving ahead.

I can’t clearly determine their numbers, but more than that, I couldn’t even confirm what sort of enemy they were.

(Just without Skills, I become this anxious, I see.)

What magic will Novem prepare? Will I have Aria go out front, or will we whittle them down, and leave the finish to her?

Even if I had to make an instantaneous decision, if the enemies didn’t approach any closer, I wouldn’t be able to decide.

Based on what I could see of them, I issued orders.

“Novem, knock them off their feet with wind. Once she’s used that, Aria, go up front! Clara, stay on standby.”

I gave out the orders, but the party’s movements seemed dull. The amount of luggage on each individual was high. The amount Clara could carry herself was limited. At the same time, collecting monster materials and magic stones was her job.

We can’t have her fully loaded from the start.

“W-wait a second!”

Aria immediately rushed forward.

“What are you doing!?”

As I said that, I put a halt to the magic gathering in Novem’s hand. I had her stand as Clara’s guard, as I rushed out front with Aria.

While she swung her spear, she offered an excuse.

“Last time we were fighting this same opponent, you had me rush

out front, didn't you!?"

"That's because we noticed them too late last time! Right now, we had time for Novem to prepare her magic, don't we?"

My panic made my tone stronger than intended, and Aria's movements slowed.

As it felt as if I had been shouting at her, she shrunk back. I didn't have the time to tell her I wasn't actually angry, so I went to face the enemies up front.

If it's just fighting, I don't have a problem, but if I have to do it while giving orders, it's completely different.

(So there's this much of a difference between setting up preparations beforehand, and making decisions in battle…)

Because I had become too used to it, the lack of Skills felt like quite an inconvenience.

The enemy before my eyes held a shield and axe that looked like they were fashioned out of metallic boards torn off the walls.

They were goblin, but they wore metal headpieces, so it was a pain to go against them.

I hit one with my after-Growth power, the goblin, shield and all, was sent flying deep into the passageway. But I don't think that finished it.

(If it's like this, even my Sabre would have been the better option! But it would have been a weight on our baggage, so I didn't bring it… Aarrrgggh! Dammit!)

I withheld my urge to shout out, and swung my mace, only to have it collide with the tip of Aria's lowering spear.

"What are you doing!"

"That one wasn't my fault!"

Aria shouted back, but I get the feeling that her voice was shaking.

(This is no good. We've lost our composure.)

Just how much of a blessing were those Skills to me… the current me felt that every time I entered into battle.

❼

Having shaken off the party tailing us, and found a room to take a break in, we sat in awkward positions.

I get the feeling she had been much closer before, but Aria took quite a bit of distance.

As I was observing her behavior, Clara called out to me.

In this room that was being dimly lit by a lantern, Novem was busy keeping watch. Perhaps tired, Aria closed her eyes as she sat.

"That previous battle was quite bad."

"… I didn't have any composure. This may sound like an excuse, but I think my thoughts were on the right track."

"No, I don't mean it like that. Your party's coordination is one thing, but it's mainly a problem of human relations."

As Clara said that, I tilted my head.

"Was there a problem? I made sure to apologize to Aria after that, and it's not like…"

Nothing happened following the battle. As I was about to say that, Clara stared at me with more focused eyes than usual.

"You don't get it?"

"… I don't get it."

I wanted to offer some response, but I truly didn't get it, so I wanted to hear whatever it was from her. She looked over at Novem.

"This is basically a party with Lyle-san as the leader."

“Yes, it was like that from the start.”

She took off her glasses, and started wiping the dirt off of them. She began explaining.

“For a party’s leader, there are various types. There’s the type that issues orders from the back. There’s the one that cuts the path open up front. There’s the one that adapts to the situation in the center of it all. Lyle, you’re the center type. You can accomplish any role, and you’re a leader that would be able to perform well wherever you went.”

Seeing me get a little embarrassed at her words, Clara went on disinterestedly.

“… Do you understand that you could take up the front line better than Aria-san? Aria-san is amazing. In just two more years… no, even in one, I think she’ll grow quite a bit if she continues to experience many things. Her movements in the labyrinth have already become much better.”

She added on a ‘but’ as she put her glasses back on, and stared at me with a serious expression.

“The fact that Lyle-san and Novem-san are so close to her has made her develop an inferiority complex. It’s quite serious. She makes mistakes even when she has no such intentions, and you or Novem-san have to follow up for her. It’s quite natural for her to wonder whether or not she’s really needed.”

“No, but that’s…”

“If you don’t stay in the center of this party, it will dissolve. The female members don’t really get along.”

Hearing that, I shook my head.

“That isn’t the case. I mean, there’s never been a fight at the mansion.”

Clara seemed to have said that with conviction. She started talking about the parties she had seen before.

“The party I had helped before was one of people who said what they wanted. There coordination was bad in some places. How about me? How about we try a different pattern next time… I brought up such a conversation during a break. When I met them outside, they were fighting as well. But they were seriously taking on their work.”

Hearing her, I quieted down.

A party centered around me… that truly was the case. But it was also a party that wouldn’t function in my absence.

Because of the Skills, those sides had stayed concealed. When I wasn’t fulfilling the role of the perfect commander, the party’s function ceased.

(So the ancestors’ Skills were even impeding Aria’s growth.)

Comrades who don’t decide on their own.

From a state where all they had to do was listen to my command, having to make split second decisions on her own probably threw the girl into confusion.

I had forgotten how adaptable Novem was.

“Lyle-san, how about you have a chat between comrades first? What you can do, what you’re insufficient in… it’s important to see those from other peoples’ eyes as well.”

I get the feeling I had learned something valuable from Clara.

Remembering the ancestors from last time, I thought I wanted someone to say something like that.

4 - Get Along

I… I don't want to study right before it…

Get Along

Having returned from the labyrinth, I put in a day of break, and gathered everyone in the mansion.

Those of my party, Novem and Aria.

The temporary helpers, and adventurers of Arumsaas, Miranda and Clara.

As well as the piece of scrap metal, Poyopoyo, and the landlord's sister, Shannon.

Including myself, I tried creating a space where the seven of us could talk.

"Why am I included as well? And those two aren't adventurers, right?"

While drinking the tea put out, Clara asked. Her eyes were pointed at Shannon, and Poyopoyo.

The reason was quite simple.

"… I have no idea what to say to break the ice. The remaining two… are just extras, I guess."

I head the Third guffawing from the Jewel.

『Lyle, you're the best!』

By best, he likely means best for a laugh. He was today's councilor, or how should I put it, up to now, they were just ignoring the rules, and all talking at once.

In the past, when my Mana was running out again and again, there was a rule made where it would be one person talking to me per

day, or calling me to the conference room otherwise.

As Clara stared at me intently, I gave an excuse.

“I mean, I have no idea what sorts of conversations happen between girls! And this is the first time we’ve been given a chance to talk like this…”

Poyopoyo poured a refill for Clara’s tea. As she looked at me, she gave a scornful laugh.

“As expected of the chicken. You’ll leave the womanly conversations to a woman, I see.”

I told myself to endure it. And the reason I called Clara was that she had a higher amount of experience as an adventurer than us.

She specialized in support, and she was in a position where she saw a wide variety of parties, so I thought listening to her opinion was important.

Also, she had an understanding of our situation to some extent. We could skip the explanations.

Novem tried breaking the awkward air.

“Then how about we talk about our impending labyrinth expedition? Does anyone have something to say on the matter?”

No one shared anything.

Shannon opened her mouth.

“I’m not an adventurer, you know. More than that, I don’t have confidence in my stamina.”

As she proclaimed her lack of confidence with full confidence, it sounded as if she was truly bragging about the fact as she ran a hand through her hair.

The pose was fitting of her, but as Novem looked over her behavior with a smile, she gave a low scream before shutting her mouth.

A few minutes passed in silence, so I lightly raised my hand…

“Ah~, well…. Personally, I want to somehow clear the thirtieth floor without using my Skills. It’s just that no matter how you look at it, there’s a problem with our numbers, and our coordination is, you know…”

Aria didn’t look me in the eye.

“Why not just use Skills? Is there a meaning in that?”

Her attitude was bad.

Novem gave her some cautionary words.

“Aria-san, that tone is a little…”

Aria shot back.

“Yeah, yeah, that’s right. It’s rude to Lyle-‘sama’, right. I’m sorry!”

As she proclaimed that loudly, I heard the Second’s voice from the Jewel.

The Second hated her.

『The hell’s with that tone!?』

The Fourth spoke.

『Isn’t she still angry about what happened a while ago? Remember, Lyle shouted at her… she seems to be stomaching quite a bit there. Why not look upon her kindly?』

The Second spoke.

『As if I’s know about something like that! That’s the opinion of a man with weak knees to women, isn’t it!?』

The Fourth responded.

『What’s wrong with being weak to them!? Even if men put up a strong front, they won’t win against women! You muscle for brains!』

The Second…

『Bastard, what do you think you’re saying to your grandfather!?

Let’s take this outside.』

Hearing the words I often heard from the First, I became a little sad. Having finished transmitting his Skill, his role ended, and he could no longer show himself.

IF that man were to see me now, I wonder what he would say.

(… It’s no good. I can only see him yelling, and picking a fight with the Second. I mean, our founder liked Aria quite a bit.)

As I started feeling down, Aria called out to me.

“I-I’m sorry. Don’t get so depressed about it.”

She was apologizing, but as I looked around at everyone’s eyes, I hurriedly regained my composure.

Miranda started talking.

“You can call me out whenever you want. I received credit from Professor Damien, and I’ve done enough preparations to graduate. At this point, it’s just something of a hobby.”

The academy’s system was one where you could enroll whenever you wanted, and graduate whenever you could. It wasn’t one that held such events by season.

If you gathered the necessary credit, and had the credentials, you could graduate whenever you wanted to.

To Miranda, Aria…

“Is it alright to decide so easily? Do you plan on joining the party?”

And…

“Oh my, are you jealous? Think I’m going to take your beloved Lyle? Aria, you sure are cute!”

Feeling teased, Aria replied.

“T-that guy isn’t related to it at all! In order to be able to live on my own one day, I’m just working together with…”

Aria's face turned red, and Novem…

"What are you saying, Aria-san? Even if you may have your circumstances, your body is one that was saved by Lyle-sama. Don't think that you can just pull out of the party whenever you like."

"Eh? She can't?"

I posed a question to Novem.

She turned to me in surprise, and began explaining the reasons.

"No, well… Dalien's feudal lord got you to accept Aria-san as a reward, and all."

I spoke.

"Wasn't that just the official stance? Just invalidate it."

Aria slammed the palm of her hand down on the table. In the room that had returned to silence, Clara disinterestedly drank her tea.

As some tea had spilled onto the table, Poyopoyo…

"Fufufu, so this is a so called scene of carnage. I've got it in my data."

… Said that, as she prepared to wipe it up.

"… In the end, that's all I am to you as a woman!"

"Why are you angry!? I just don't have any intentions of binding you down, is what I was trying to say!"

While I tried thinking of the reason why she might be angry, the Fourth addressed me.

『There's no way Lyle would ever be able to understand the complexities of a woman's heart.』

The Fifth spoke.

『You're just under the delusion that you understand it. I'm fully aware that I never did.』

There, the Sixth spoke.

『… Even so, if it wasn't related to dealing with his children, the Fifth had everything going quite well.』

I thought.

(What should I do. These guys aren't reliable at all.)

I looked at Novem. However…

"Lyle-sama, that's going too far…"

Miranda was smiling.

"Then I'd like to announce my candidacy. In Aria's place."

In the party, you mean? Or are you volunteering for something else? Miranda-san didn't voice that.

Misunderstanding something, Aria…

"I-I never said anything about conceding Lyle or anything!"

Grinning widely, Miranda-san spoke.

"Huh? I was thinking of entering the party in yoru absence, or at least that's what I intended when I said it, you know?"

Upon being teased, Aria turned away her face.

Clara opened her mouth.

"… Lyle-san."

"Yes?"

"You damn womanizer~"

As Clara called me a womanizer in monotone, my face cramped up. I don't mean to brag, but until recently, I was a pure boy who had never even received a kiss from a woman. Being called a womanizer is…

Clara handed down her final evaluation of the party.

“It’s that. It truly is the ideal of all gentlemen, a classic harem party. I don’t think you’ll find many out there with completion of this level. Whether it be for better or for worse, it’s an idolized party form.”

For better, was probably referring to its idolization by men.

The worse was likely that she understood this sort of party didn’t function.

I tried asking her.

“I-is there any way to solve or better the problem?”

Clara started talking, backed by the experiences she’d amassed up to now.

“Among the parties I know, there were some that, in order to avoid squabbles regarding female relations, would never take them in as members. Male-only parties. When affectiosn become muddled, the party’s coordination collapses.”

Are you telling me to withdraw myself?

“So if I leave the party, will it be resolved?”

Novem let out her voice.

“That isn’t happening. Rejected. Matter dismissed.”

Clara nodded.

“Right. I mean, if Lyle-san leaves, the party will disperse anyways. And wait, your personal skill levels already reach the main body of adventurers. Coordination is… without Skills, I guess you’re better than amateurs, is how I’ll put it. If you withdraw from this party, I think Aria-san will still be dragging her feet.”

Clara tried to give a followup to Aria, but the individual herself was…

“E-even if you tell me that…”

“You’re all extraordinary, talent-wise. How about we put the standard around fifty? If you’re just judging based on talent, this party would average around a ninety. Even if you say Aria’s on the lower side,

her numbers are still in the seventies to eighties.”

She continued on.

“And if you add in any members of the opposite sex besides Lyle-san, it will fall through. Rather than saying love matters will become complicated… the males will not be able to endure it.”

Why won’t they be able to endure? Damien didn’t have any problems.

Also, I wanted some people of the same comrades to talk to as well.

Understanding that I was unable to understand, Clara spoke.

“If there were lovely ladies around, and they were all flocking around a single gentleman, would one want to join only to be left sad, and alone? While being comrades, do you think they’d want to taste that sense of alienation?”

“… They wouldn’t.”

I finally understood, and agreed with her.

If we were recruiting comrades, males were no good.

“One or two would pose a problem, but if a large number joined, them more or less… but this isn’t the sort of party that can manage that many, and the foundation isn’t set.”

Foundations.

A party with a stable foundation meant that it had members that fulfilled all the fundamental roles.

While our place had high talents, we didn’t have any that could do scouting, or disarm traps.

“No, a family that large is… I’ll have to reject that one.”

When Novem refused, Clara gave a method to resolve the problem.

“How about dividing it up?”

“Division?”

As I tilted my head, Clara spoke.

“Lyle-san, you can generally accomplish anything on your own, and you have a strong tendency to try resolving things on your own. While you may have a number of Skills, with the others considered, it may be best to divide to have them polish their technique. No, wait, normally, you would decide everyone’s roles first. Once you’ve all obtained a level of competency, you decide who will polish their abilities in a certain field. You see everyone’s aptitudes, and decide your future objectives. That’s standard.”

I was too reliant on my Skills that a problem came from everyone else not feeling necessary. Rather than trained abilities, no… rather than general specialized adventurers, the potency of my Skills were higher.

“I guess the basic one is scouting. The role to walk ahead, and check for danger. I think Aria-san is appropriate for that one. I have some acquaintances in the field, so do you want me to introduce them?”

Clara prepared a memo, and Aria accepted it.

“Next is traps… I think Miranda-san has quite an aptitude. It’s just a feeling, though.”

Hearing that, Miranda-san smiled.

“Right. I am on the dexterous side.”

Clara whispered.

“… People with your personality tend to be good at this sort of work.”

“Yes?”

“No, nothing. Well then, Novem-san is… unnecessary. Just polish your magic as you always have.”

Novem spoke.

“Is that so? That’s a bit unfortunate. I want to be useful, somehow.”

The Second spoke up.

『Novem-chan, it’s fine as long as you’re there. As I thought, she sure is a good girl!.』

Agreeing with his opinions, I waited for Clara to say more.

But she left it at that.

“And that’s how it is. It will take time for you to become professionals. But if you all work on your various roles, and get some experience in them, the party’s shape will solidify in a few months.”

“Eh? What about me?”

As I asked, Clara…

“You’re fine as you are. Generally, a leader’s role is managing the party. Your job is to think about how well you can manage the party. Regulating everyone’s schedules, and making plans is a splendid job in itself.”

Her explanation was satisfying, but shouldn’t I be polishing some sort of Skill as well? As I said that, Clara spoke.

“Lyle-san, you take over everyone else’s jobs too much. If they can do it, then leaving it to them is also a leader’s role. What you should be doing is…”

“Is?”

“Decide how to distribute the luggage. Also, if you invite another female adventurer or two, it will be perfect.”

I stated my direct opinion.

“I’m kinda starting to feel like scum… you know, like… being completely surrounded by women.”

“Yes, that’s an accurate description. It’s fine. Your standing in Arumsaas is questionable, but your face is on the better side, so you

should be able to nab a woman or two. After that, use your time to build up favorable relations.”

Novem expressed herself.

“T-that’s no good!”

“Novem! That’s right. I can’t do something like that!”

“You have to find women that fit the Walt Family Precepts! I won’t recognize anyone else!”

Clara tilted her head. I became silent, and I covered my face with both hands.

Aria didn’t seem interested, as it was a natural occurance, but only Miranda-san stared at Novem with a serious expression.

Shannon, who was just listening in the whole time, spoke up.

“I’m not related to any of this, right? Why was I even called here?”

Poyopoyo as well.

“I can also fulfill a role. I mean… I’m a special model!”

I ignored the two of them.

❼

… Aria took a visit to the adventurer Clara had introduced.

It wasn’t at the guild. At a cheap-looking apartment, she checked the nameplate before knocking on the door.

From inside the room, she heard a muffled voice.

『Who could it be?』

“U-um, I’m Clara-san’s acquaintance, and she told me to inquire about something here!”

The other person…

『Lady Clara? Well, so be it.』

The door opened, and standing there, was a woman with ruffled hair. Her age was in the latter half of her thirties. There were the remains of old burns on her face.

And the woman did not have a left arm.

As Aria's eyes turned to her arm, the Woman spoke.

"Ah~, so you're not used to such a sight. Well, you're young, so I guess you don't drop by the bars. Come in, why don't you?"

The woman snatched the memo in Aria's hands, and confirmed it was by Clara's hand before letting Aria into the room.

While its outsides looked quite cheap, the room was quite well organized. It seems she lived there alone, and on top of a table stood a prosthetic arm.

"U-um…"

"That's my work. I'm good at that sort of thing, so I make simple magic tools to get some coins to scrape by. It's less profitable than my main job, but it's enough to eat in this town."

Tools were hung the walls, and parts were neatly lined up.

"I'm【Lyra Ickler】. A woman once born to the celeb house of a small village. My surname's the relic of that."

Aria also introduced herself.

"I'm Aria Lockwarde."

Lyra started smiling.

"I know you. You fulfilled that pervert's request, and you're in a young, but skillful party, right? What business does the vanguard of such a party have with me?"

As Aria never thought she would know so much about her, she explained in a slight surprise.

With a slight tired expression, Lyra put her right hand on her face. Aria stared into the eyes visible in the gaps between her fingers, as her request's contents were confirmed.

"… Meaning you want to learn my style? Able to scout, and rush on the front lines, mine?"

"Y-yes!"

Lyra muttered about how she wouldn't recommend it.

"You can understand it, looking at this body, right? It's a dangerous job. Too large a burden for a woman. If you say you want to do it no matter what… be sure you won't mind even if you're covered in scars at the end. Don't complain if you lose an arm or two."

Aria swallowed her spit. But rather than being unable to do anything, it was a much better option, or so she reassured herself.

(If I ran here, then I really will become useless. So…)

"I-I'll do it!"

Lyra covered her mouth, as she started laughing. As Aria was taken aback, she apologized, as she continued laughing.

"Sorry. I tried testing you. These wounds are from back when I was inexperienced, you hear? Generally, if it's dangerous, the correct response is to not approach. Having been such a fool, this is the mouth of someone who earnestly studied it."

Aria was shocked, but Lyra continued.

"I've been in that lady's acre a few times. Like in gathering info at the library, or carrying baggage. She's generally a solo companion."

"So that's how it was…"

As Aria said that, Lyra entered into negotiations.

"Well then, I don't mind teaching you, but I also have a job here. I can open up three days a week. Also, the fee is…"

Lyra looked over Aria, and considered the amount.

“If it’s that girl’s recommendation, you probably have the potential. I mean, you’re party’s the talk of the town. The period is two months, and twenty gold is fine.”

Hearing twenty gold coins, Aria was surprised. More than that, she didn’t have that sort of large sum. She had received rewards, but even put together, they were five gold tops.

“U-um, can’t you put it just a little lower?”

“I’m giving up my time to instruct you, you know? And also, what am I supposed to do about the earnings I’m losing in that space? You didn’t think you’d earn the techniques for free, did you?”

Aria hung her head. Seeing that, Lyra gave her conditions.

“Then I’ll take all the earning you make on requests under my instruction. I’ll also have you assist me in my work. How does that sound?”

“Y-yes! If that’s it, I think I can do it!”

Lyra spoke.

“Well, I don’t often get a chance to teach. My style’s that of a scout who can do battle on the front as well. How good are you, kid?”

Aria grasped her Spear, and…

“… Neither good, nor bad. If it’s in battle, then I’m handy with a spear, though.”

Thinking a while, Lyra turned to Aria’s chest.

“Is that perhaps a gem?”

“Eh? Y-yes.”

Lyra confirmed what sorts of Skills she had. While Aria hesitated for a moment, she divulged them.

“So it’s specialized in offense. It’s much better than a lower level magic tool…”

“Um…?”

“If you’ve come this far with a spear, I guess that’s the one most used to your hand… Aria, want to try a short spear?”

And so, Aria was also moving to establish her own style…

5 - Clara’s Adventurer Course

That wasn’t nearly as bad as I thought, so have a chapter.

Clara’s Adventurer Course

In a small room of the library, I watched Clara work as I talked with her.

When I said I wanted to ask a few things, she said she had work, and declined. Fitting of a book lover like her, she took a request at the library today.

Saying I would assist her, I also got permission from the library to take the request alongside her.

She was on standby in a small room, but there, a staff member carrying a few volumes of books.

“Clara, can I leave these to you? One copy each. The period is one week.”

“Yes.”

The plump-ish middle aged female worker handed Clara three of the books, and Clara returned to her seat, and began using her Skill on them.

“… What are you doing?”

She held the Skill known as【Reading】, and it was said to not be that much of a rare one.

Just by holding a book in your hands, it was a useful one that let you comprehend its contents…

But it’s hard to remember those contents, and Clara said she liked reading them normally more.

“I’m reading the book to understand it. Like this…”

She kept flipping the pages with her right hand, and used her Skill on her left.

“…【Copy】.”

A book of the same sort started to manifest.

As I stood shocked at the scene, Clara did the same to the other books, and finished copying all three of them. She stuck a seal on the copied volumes.

“… Isn’t that amazing?”

I praised her Skill, and from the Jewel, I could hear the Third in high spirits.

『This child’s amazing! She keeps saying she’s nothing special, but look at that!』

… At least she gives better advice than the ancestors. I recognize that she’s amazing.

Clara picked up the six books, left the room, and soon returned.

She took her seat, and started reading.

“That was the contents of the request I accepted. We don’t allow for lending, but we do sell volumes that will disappear after a certain amount of time has passed. Ah, the copies are a limited time thins. What’s more, the Skill is limited only to books. As I made those ones, they’ll last for a week.”

Even if it was limited, that didn’t change that it was an incredible Skill.

(I see, so lending out is prohibited, but like this, you can take out time-restricted book volumes… I should have asked for the specifics earlier.)

I regretted that I didn’t ask about the library’s system in depth earlier, but it seems that taking them out costs money.

If I was going to regularly commute to the library anyways, then it wasn’t something I had to care about.

It’s just that it’s true that I was impressed.

“I think it’s amazing enough… is that one of your Skill’s greater applications?”

As I asked, Clara nodded.

“This Skill is one pertaining only to books. That’s what links its effects. While it has some restrictions, I don’t know its full extent as of yet.”

While she started explaining while reading, I began cleaning the small room.

“There was something I was curious about, but is it alright if I asked?”

Without taking her eyes off of her book, she spoke.

“I get the just of it. Will Aria-san and the others be able to acquire the necessary technical Skills? It was about that, right? To put it bluntly, to get the average amount of technique of a specialized adventurer, it would require time units of years.”

Isn’t that quite a bit of time there? Just what am I supposed to do in that space?

I had a mountain of things to ask.

But Clara went on.

“However, limited only to the city of Arumsaas, even if they don’t master the trade, they’ll give results to an extent.”

“Even if they don’t master is?”

As I asked, Clara gave a simple explanation.

“I mean, in the places that adventurers use as hunting grounds, most of the information is readily disclosed. Also, the monsters that come out in it are predetermined. While there are some differences here and there, I don’t think there’s anything they won’t be able to come with.”

Having been told that, I heard a voice from the Jewel.

It was the Second.

『Oh my, so she told him… isn't this girl good at looking after others? From her appearance and personality, the impression she gives off is way too far off.』

The Fourth spoke in agreement.

『It's because in order to survive, communication is also important. Even more so for a solo who specializes in support of all things. There's no doubt she's the type that gets over enthusiastic over whatever she's interested in, though.』

So these guys knew all of this, and kept quiet?

I tried asking.

"Meaning as long as we limit ourselves to Arumsaas…"

"It will take shape in two to three months. For an adventurer to decide a base of operations for earnings, it's often the case that a pattern is formed. Use the specialized patterns of the local land. While they may not reach into the realm of complete specialists, they'll definitely display some results."

But Clara warned me.

They were just taking shape, and it's not like they were actual specialists.

If they got the experience, Aria and the others would become something quite considerable. But the efficiency and effect would be different when compared to real ones.

(In order to clear it swiftly, we have to specialize in clearing Arumsaas' labyrinth for now, is what it means. From the ancestors' demeanor, I wonder if they understood that from the beginning.)

Thinking of why they would keep quiet over such a thing, I could understand it instantly.

They weren't favoring my current actions.

(I thought it would be easy if I just asked, but I see… they wanted to have me think of it for myself.)

While I felt ashamed of myself for relying too much on Clara, I gave my thanks.

“I see. Thank you, Clara. Because of that, I’ve been able to decide on my objective.”

Seeing her finish reading her book, I…

(She sure does read fast…)

Thought that.

“I don’t mind. I mean, I did have some personal interest in it… also, Lyle-san?”

“Yes?”

“You seem to be in a hurry, but remember that preparation is important in everything. As long as you don’t forget that, your chances of success in everything will rise. That’s all I’ve to say.”

Saying that, Clara took a new book in hand.

❼

Having pulled Poyopoyo to Damien’s laboratory, I ended up consulting him there.

“… A golem not in humanoid form? If you just want me to speak to the result, then yes, it will move. Its control will be different, though.”

“I see.”

In the room that had become much tidier than before, I stared at something that looked like a blueprint as I started to think.

Within the room, Poyopoyo faced off against another automaton, and their eyes flashed red a couple of times.

Looking at it was scary.

“And wait, you came over just to ask something like that? There wasn’t any change in the automaton, or some new thing you noticed, or anything? Generally, we’re both using them as maids, so the reports I get always say the same things… did you try taking her to battle?”

What is this one saying?

As I thought that, the Seventh spoke.

『Lyle, come to think of it, didn’t Poyopoyo say it? That she would be useful? There’s a possibility that she may actually be able to handle combat. I mean, no matter how you put it, she is an ancient automaton.』

The form the Seventh took within the jewel was one of his thirties with a refined air about him.

Imagining him saying Poyopoyo with a straight face made me feel like bursting into laughter.

That name’s surprisingly establishing itself.

“C-can she do it? I was sure she would break.”

“Why are you smiling like that? And well, I tried giving her a heavy load, and she has quite a bit of power in that body. So I was wondering how it would be…”

Damien looked at the automatons glaring at one another. The other automatons saw Damien’s movements, and called out.

“No. 2, master is calling for you. Cease with your pointless fighting.”
“Quite caring about that pitiful pile of scrap metal, and answer to master’s demands.”

Looking at the automatons that said that, I…

“Eh? That was a fight?”

Damien spoke.

“Apparently. Somehow just by staring into each other’s’ eyes, they can have lightning fast data exchanges, or something… I wonder

why those ancients gave them such a function. It's a mystery."

Poyopoyo started shaking angrily. The automaton known as No. 2 raised a victorious smile.

These guys are scary.

Anyways, she directed a nice smile at Damien.

"What could it be, master?"

That smile didn't seem to have any value to the man. He didn't give the slightest reaction.

"Are you guys capable of battle? To what extent can you fight?"

No. 2 answered.

"Combat is possible, but we are not battle models, so there is a limit to that. We haven't been able to go out of here very much, so we have much too little information on what you call monsters, but I have determined we would be able to take care of those around the city of Arumsaas without weapons."

I unintentionally put out my mouth.

"Eh? You can take on monsters unarmed?"

And reacting to me, Poyopoyo…

"This is why those mass produced defects are no good. I, Poyopoyo… the special model model, am an amazing entity that can handle combat without a problem! If I were in the mood, then these mass produced ones would be scrap before you…"

"Stop it. Don't you feel sorry for them?"

As I stopped her, Damien said…

"I kinda want to see it, but if they break, then cleaning the lab would be a pain."

To Damien, it seems the automatons were a sort of household appliance. No, there's no doubt that they're maids, though.

While he was saying quite a cruel thing, the three automatons were smiling brightly.

“At this rate, we’ll make it so that his body cannot live without us.”
“Right, he’ll feel oh so anxious without us.”
“The first stage has been cleared. Let’s move onto stage two.”

Even hearing that, Damien didn’t pay it any mind.

Poyopoyo seemed to receive a shock upon me caloling the other automatons pitiful.

“… Even when I’m this chicken dickwad’s exclusive machine. Even when I can serve this god damn chicken better than anyone else…”

My thoughts on the matter…

“Automatons are scary.”

Damien looked at me, and offered a suggestion.

“Lyle, why not take that automaton outside, and try having her fight? I’ll give out a reward, and when she gets used to it, have her challenge the labyrinth. If it seems impossible, we’ll give up on that part, though.”

On his request, I looked towards Poyopoyo.

She was sending back a reliable look. She didn’t look to be the same timid scrap heap as before.

(This girl is a pain…)

“Well, I’ll at least test it.”

The other members are busy, so it was determined that I would be acting alone for a while.

It isn’t a bad idea to consult wit Novem, and to try taking Poyopoyo outside.

Hearing that, Poyopoyo spoke.

“Fufufu, I can finally even take care of this chicken on the battlefield

as well. Leave it all to me. Even if it's in the outside world, I'll show you I can prepare the finest of full courses!"

She seemed to be overly motivated, but I rejected.

"Eh? I think we should stick to easy-to-eat sandwiches out there."

A Dejected Poyopoyo…

"Is that so… but I'd like it if you keep in mind I have motivation to that extent… ah, also, there's something I'd like to consult about, but Professor Pervert?"

As she called to Damien, the three automatons eyes let of red light as they glared at her.

"What is it?"

"Are you still safekeeping the metal the chicken dickhead brought back?"

"That's right. Processing that one is difficult, so I don't think anything's been done to it."

Hearing that, she turned to me.

"Chicken bastard, please allow me to use that metal! I'll put it to much better use than you ever could."

It's true that I was troubled over what to do with it, but hearing it like that is somewhat irritating.

But complaining to this one doesn't get anywhere.

"Do whatever you want."
"I'll do the hell out of whatever I want!"

Like that, I learned of an unexpected use for Poyopoyo.

❼

Outside of Arumsaas, I watched the scene with my eyes wide open.

An unarmed Poyopoyo somehow produced a hammer that's height exceeded even her own from under her skirt.

With power I couldn't imagine coming from her slender arms, and swung it horizontally at the monster.

The monster was sent flying off in a shape I couldn't describe with words, but what I was more concerned about was just where she took that hammer out of…

There was also the problem of it being made of a material I had seen before.

"Y-you…"

"How about it? Have you been shocked by my strength, chicken dickhead? You can leave the front lines to me. If you do, then all day every day, I'll be serving by your si… oh my, my drool is…"

"You… just how did you make that?"

I looked at her hammer, and noticed it was made from the armor of the boss we dispatched on the fortieth floor.

If I'm to believe Damien when he said it was a material hard to process, then I have to be surprised that she manufactured her weapon in so short of a time.

"… Eh? That's what you're worried about? You're not interested in the contents of my skirt or anything? And you still call yourself a man? How about you get yourself shocked over my strength, or praise me, or do something. There are plenty of other things, you know? What's to be of the standing of the girl who was sure she'd be showered with surprise or praise?"

I looked at the monster left in a terrible state, and spoke with a smile.

"Automatons can daydream? More importantly, if you don't hold back a little more, we won't be able to collect the materials. Why not think a bit? But it's amazing for you to have the technology to process that metal. Can you form it into any shape you want?"

Poyopoyo affirmed expressionlessly.

“Well, if it’s something on the level of the wreckage of that mobilized weapon… there were several differing parts in my data, but the materials were similar enough.”

I put my hand to my chin in thought.

(In that case, we can do this… and Poyopoyo’s power will also be a contributing factor. I thought there was a need for me to recruit someone else, but I guess this resolves matters a bit.)

As Clara said, it was something I needed to think about on my own.

To actualize that, I’ll need Poyopo’s strength, or more so, her technology.

I grabbed the shoulders of the maid expressionlessly holding up the hammed that was heavy enough to dig into he ground.

“You’re amazing, Poyopoyo! So you weren’t just a disappointing automaton! I’ve gotten a better opinion of you!”

Her face gradually flushed a light red, she turned her head away, and in a quiet voice…

“I-it’s not like I was trying hard for your sake or anything, idiot… the phrase that I’ve always wanted to say… the time has finally come for it to be put to use!”

The Third spoke.

『What the hell is this child saying?』

The Sixth was…

『I don’t think you have to think so deeply about it. And wait, it’s probably something beyond our comprehension.』

The Fifth seemed cold.

『This automaton is no good. As I thought, wouldn’t some cute animal be a better healing factor here? Lyle, for my own personal tranquility, won’t you find a…』

Since the last talk we had about the Qilin, the Fifth remained in a broken state.

If we just left alone, he would likely go back eventually, so I decided not to worry about it.

Even so, Poyopoyo being motivated was a good thing.

I continued praising her, and began putting my scheme into motion.

“I don’t really get it, but you’re amazing.”

Poyopoyo turned red all the way to her ears, and she was shaking.

“What a magnificent day it is… For that worthless chicken to finally realize my worth. But it’s a bit unsatisfying that he didn’t praise me as a maid.”

She seemed happy, but there was some part she couldn’t accept. I took her along, and decided to return to the mansion.

But before that…

“Well then, I want to collect the magic stones and other such things, but… this is quite brutal.”

The ground was died red in a large radius, and a brutal spectacle extended before me.

(A hammer that big won’t be of any use in the labyrinth, so she’ll have to carry bags.)

I resolved myself, and got to collecting the stones and materials from the tattered remains.

6 - Shannon Circry

… Morning.

Shannon endured the sleepy feeling, and raised the upper half of her body.

In the past, even if she was to sleep in, her tender sister would kindly wake her. She would prepare breakfast, and make in a way easy for Shannon to eat.

Then her sister would head off to the academy, and she would spend the rest of the day in leisure.

Lunch was always prepared already, so if she ever got hungry, she had only to reach for it.

When night came, her older sister would take care of her once more.

There had been servants around a couple of times, but Shannon's eyes… when she tried testing her demon eyes, they ended up running away.

No, she drove them away.

And now, that girl's new life was…

"Urgh… I have to get up already."

She didn't want to leave the bed, but the reason she raised herself so early in the morning was because she had a terrifying mentor.

Shannon changed her clothes, and headed for the kitchen.

While her sense of vision had gone out, her other senses had sharpened.

At the same time, her lack of eyesight served as the catalyst to awaken a Skill.

With her specialized Skill, Shannon could observe the fluctuations of others' Mana to discern their emotions and the like.

Her demon eyes showed her the flow of Mana invisible to other people.

By touching that flow, she had created techniques to manipulate others… but…

"You're late, Shannon-chan."

When she arrived at the kitchen, there was already a woman hard at work preparing food.

It was Novem.

"I-I'm sorry."

The sensation of waking up was quite a horrid one. Even so, when she forced herself to move, she was still scolded for her lack of punctuality.

It was as if the environment she had lived in had been a lie. Her current life started in the kitchen.

"Please wash your face. When you've finished that, set out the place. Then… no, before that, please observe how Lyle-sama and Poyopoyo-san are faring."

Not too long ago, it was a normal sight to find Poyopoyo moving around the kitchen alongside Novem. But right now, she and Lyle were holing themselves in the mansion's storehouse.

From morning to night, they repeated a process of shaving and melting metal.

Occasionally, intense quarrels could also be heard.

"They're… sleeping."

Using the ability of her eyes, Shannon confirmed Lyle and Poyopoyo's state. The fact that she could confirm it without moving from her spot was likely due to the high level of her sight.

She selected only whatever information she was interested, and she could see it whenever she wanted.

There, Novem spoke.

Novem's Mana, which would never give the slightest hint of swaying in the slightest was, upon closer inspection, extremely dense. It wasn't something that would be noticed if looked at normally, but it was clearly abnormal.

Shannon had never seen a human being like that up to now.

"Then please go wake the two of them. Make sure you tell them to wash their hands and faces as well."

Novem continued her cooking.

To Shannon, there wer three humans she was sure she wouldn't be able to defeat.

The first was her sister Miranda.

The next Novem.

And the last one was the one she met at a party, Celes.

If one of those unopposable three were to giver her an order, the current Shannon had no choice but to follow.

"… I got it."

Leaving the kitchen, she headed for the door out, and left the building.

She couldn't exactly tell whether the morning sun was bright or not, but she could understand that the weather was nice.

Even if what entered her senses was different, rather than visual information, Shannon's eyes were able to pick up a much greater variety of stimuli.

Heading towards the storehouse, she found junk littered all over the place.

Lyle had lined up some wooden boxes, and he was lying on top of them.

While he had a blanket draped over him, he was quite exposed.

Poyopoyo was in what she called sleep mode, and her eyes were closed as she stood. Both of them were covered in something like black soot.

Shannon looked at the large box that had been left in the center of the room.

Four legs.

There were some wheels lying close to it. She thought they might have been trying to build something like a carriage, but from what she could see, it was likely something else.

“Just what is this junk… they’ve spent several days making something like this?”

While Lyle was supposed to be an adventurer, recently, he had been commuting to the library and academy, only to work with Poyopoyo whenever he got back.

The library to meet Clara.

The academy to drop by Damien’s laboratory.

The one Shannon had some memories of playing with in her youth, Aria, would go off somewhere in the morning to receive instruction.

After graduating, her sister Miranda went off to a private school to acquire adventuring knowledge pertaining to traps.

While it didn’t seem necessary, Novem continued training her magic.

The three of them were moving to polish themselves.

And within that, only Lyle…

“S-stop it… no more Best Lyle…”

(… What’s Best Lyle supposed to be? Is this man a narcissist?)

He seemed to be having a nightmare.

From a gap around his chest, a blue Jewel was visible.

(I can see six lights from it. Within Lyle, I can see yet another light.)

She couldn't think of it as something similar to Aria's gem. Lyle's blue gem was…

Within it, she could see six distinct lights.

Another similar one was shining in Lyle's body, and it looked accustomed to being there.

"… S-stop… I won't do it again, so…"

Shannon pinched the writhing Lyle's nose shut.

"It wasn't my fault!"

Lyle shouted that out as he leapt himself awake. He took a few deep breaths.

When he observed his surroundings, he suddenly looked extremely relieved for some reason.

And the lights within the blue gem began moving about.

Lyle held his hand to his forhead, and looked at Shannon.

"… Why can't you wake me up normally?"

"Eh? I did try using my voice to wake you at first."

As Shannon lied with a straight face, Poyopoyo, who had waken up at some point, started speaking.

"That's a lie. You called the fruit of my and the chicken dickhead's love a piece of junk. On top of that, you didn't do anything like calling out to him."

Poyopoyo said that with a tidy expression, but the area around her nose was quite blackened.

"… You guys should go wash your maces and hands. Novem's

waiting.”

Lyle spoke.

“Is it about breakfast? What did she make today?”

As he stood and started to leave the storehose, Lyle appeared to be curious about the breakfast menu.

In contrast, Poyopoyo…

“That damn vixen! For her to taint my holy sanctuary!! Chicken dickwad, I’ll take care of breakfa…”

“No, just eat Novem’s cooking. And wait, for an automaton to sleep in late… why don’t you learn from those other three?”

The three referred to the ones acting as maids at Damien’s place.

Shannon also thought that, but Poyopoyo gave an excessive response.

“I’d appreciate it if you didn’t compare a special model like me to some mass produced trash! Are you listening here? If you don’t properly listen, I’ll cry, you know! I’ll cry enough it’ll get annoying, you know!”

“… You’re already plenty annoying.”

As Lyle said that with a smile, Poyopoyo declared, ‘I hate that smile of yours,’ or something along those lines as she followed him in high spirits.

(I wonder what those ancients were thinking when they built an automaton like that.)

Connected to Lyle by a thin thread, his magic was flowing into the maid’s body. That flow was definitely something different than that of a human’s.

No, it was similar, but there were clear differences.

As the two headed towards the mansion, they continued verbally abusing one another, and it looked like they got along quite well.

Shannon closed the doors to the storage room, and as she had barely ever moved her body up to now, it felt quite heavy.

When she tried to enter the mansion, Aria burst out of the door

“Crap, she’ll be angry! If I’m late, the Lyra-san’s fist is…!!”

Holding a sandwich with ham and vegetables in her mouth, Aria put her hair in order with a comb, and confirmed her apparel and equipment as she ran.

Recently, she was getting numerous cuts and bruises, and whenever she got into the bath, she would let out a voice of ecstasy of, ‘Ahn~ it’s soaking into my body~’ as if it were a hot spring.

Compared to when she first came to the mansion, it felt like she was getting manlier and manlier.

But in front of Lyle, she put up a front.

If the girl herself was asked if she was aware of that, her face would likely turn red in confusion.

In the past, the fact that she was born into a militaristic family served as the reason for why she swung around her spear with a tomboyish impression.

But now, the feeling she gave off was closer to a female soldier.

After staying a while in this town, that trend only grew stronger. Under specialized instruction, she was definitely polishing herself, but Shannon worried that she was losing something important as a woman.

(Should I perhaps tell her that Lyle saw her when she was sleeping on the living room sofa in her undergarments? And wait, where is she even headed?)

In comparison to Aria, you looked to be stepping off her original parh, Miranda had finished her preparations, and headed out the door.

“Oh, Shannon. You were still out here? I thought you had run away

from helping Novem, but you were in a place like this?”

Shannon looked at her grinning sister.

She wasn’t wearing her academy uniform. A skirt, and a long coat gave her a rough appearance.

She was also wearing a bag, but inside it was tools pertaining to traps.

Not too long ago, she was like a kind mother, but now, her blacker parts were coming out, putting Shannon through hell.

It’s just that rather than more importantly…

“… I-I forgot!”

Novem had told her to go wake up Lyle, but she had unintentionally spent time loafing around the yard.

As she immediately burst into the mansion, Miranda spoke.

“Do your best today as well! I’ll be back in the afternoon.”

Even being told that, to Shannon, Novem waiting in the kitchen for her was the higher priority.

When she finally got back, she found Novem ignoring Poyopoyo, as she watched over Lyle eating the meal she had finished preparing.

“You vixen! That role is mine, and mine alone!”

“Is it tasty, Lyle-sama?”

“It’s tasty.”

While she was creating a heartwarming scene, when she noticed Shannon, she directed a smile in her direction.

Her emotions weren’t disturbed in the slightest. More so, she was even more serene than when she was talking to Lyle. Her gentleness was brought to too much of an extreme that it turned terrifying.

She was never disturbed. Normally, humans… even the automaton Poyopoyo could be flustered. But Novem never showed a sign of

that.

When she first noticed that, Shannon had found it ridiculously ominous.

Her instincts had screamed out to her in peril.

“Shannon-chan.”

“Y-yes!”

“Go wash your face and hands first. Once you’ve finished breakfast, we’ll start cleaning up.”

She wasn’t angry.

But Shannon could only find that fact to be scary.

At that time.

“Ah, I’ll be dropping by Damien, and heading to the library after that, so I don’t need lunch. I’ll just eat outside. Poyopoyo is…”

“It goes without saying that I will accompany you. I have to keep watch so that the bespeckled woman doesn’t lay her hands on your chastity.”

After staring at Poyopoyo, Lyle turned his face to Novem.

“Damien didn’t tell me to bring her or anything, so I’ll be leaving her. Make sure you work her to the bone.”

“Maassstteerr! But I cannot disobey orders!”

An energetic Poyopoyo’s mana fluctuated in a way that Shannon was unsure to read as happy or sad.

Lyle was normal. He had a doubtful fluctuation.

And Novem also swayed just a little.

“Understood. Do you have any requests for dinned?”

While Lyle started thinking over his evening meal, the lights in the blue gem started to move. It was as if they were calling out to the

boy.

She got the feeling Lyle was listening to them as well.

(I wonder what that gem really is.)

Aria's red gem never displayed a phenomenon like this. She could see four lights in it, but they quietly remained, as if they simply existed there.

They never asserted themselves.

Lyle's blue one was as if it gave off a lively feeling…

❼

… Noon.

The lunch prepared by Poyopoyo to her last breath was eaten by Novem and Shannon.

Shannon was worn out today.

Cleaning, laundry, shopping…

If it was going to turn out like this, then even if she hated it, she should have left the servants, or so Shannon started to regret at this point in time.

"Shannon-chan, your way of eating is unrefined."

"Isn't it fine? I mean, I can't see or anything."

Novem fixed her eyes on her.

"Hiii! I'll do it properly! That's all I need to do, right!?"

"That's right. I'm sure you can do it if you try, so make sure you eat properly."

Now, there was no way she could oppose.

In the past, she was able to touch the flow of others' mana, and

throw it out of order, but having touched Novem, and learned fear, she was too scared to be able to do it.

Her mental motivation… she didn't want to touch it.

"Yes, please eat it properly. I couldn't make it for the chicken dickhead's sake, but as it was an order, I put my heart into making it, damn bitch."

The food Poyopoyo made was delicious.

It was unthinkable that it was something produced by a machine.

For a normal human… a standard woman, it would be dubious if they could make anything on this level.

But her tone was quite terrible.

Shannon tried asking.

"You heart definitely isn't in this, is it? Is Lyle really that precious to you?"

And…

"D-don't be stupid. T-there's no way I like a guy like him. It's just that his figure as he tries hard is dazzling, and his defenseless sleeping face is cute, and… anyways, it isn't anything like that!"

It felt as if she had suddenly started reading lines from a play, and seeing the automaton suddenly act them out, Shannon began to question whether she was broken.

Novem was normal. She didn't say anything.

As Poyopoyo finished up her lines, she gave a refreshed face.

"Fufu, recently, I've been able to apply quite a bit of my collection of lines I've always wanted to say. At this rate, the last scene is definitely going to be my route's happy ending. I'll say whatever I must."

Shannon thought.

(This girl is a pain… as I thought, the ancients had a screw loose somewhere.)

She abandoned the automaton that had become immersed in self-satisfaction, and returned to her meal…

❼

… Night.

When everything was over, and all that was left was for her to sleep, Shannon entered the bed, and opened her mouth.

“Hah, I’m tired…”

She had relied on the servants and Miranda too much, so the lifestyle she couldn’t get used to was quite hard on her.

On the first two days, she was plagued with harsh muscle pains.

Up to now, she had played the part of the fleeting young maiden without anything before her eyes, but she had been left groaning on top of her bed through sore muscles.

The smile Miranda raised upon seeing that was quite irritating.

However, in order to have her sister forgive her for all she’d done up to now, she couldn’t go against her.

Day by day, she would acquire more knowledge on traps, and she showed rapid improvement that would make one think she was gifted with genius in the field.

If she went against a sister like that, just what sort of hell would she go through… she was too afraid to try doing anything.

“And wait, just what’s so great about that kid?”

It was the same question she thought every day.

What’s so good about Lyle?

Miranda wasn’t one to choose just based on the merits of his face.

Shannon also understood he excelled as an adventurer. Of all things, even if he was the lowest himself, he had eight Skills on him.

And Aria also put on her womanly front before him. Though that one was obvious.

Poyopoyo didn't even try to hide it.

And then there was Novem.

That Novem only ever showed a sway in her Mana when Lyle was concerned.

"… Just what part of him is so good?"

As of late, that's the only thing she could think.

At this rate, her sister would continue to close her eyes to him, and it seems that she was going to reach an irreversible level of strength in the wrong direction because of that.

She wanted to stop that somehow, but she couldn't' think of the means.

"Just you watch. I'll definitely get back at you, Lyle!"

Saying that, Shannon thought about Lyle all the way until she fell asleep…

7 - Lyle's Golem

In the yard of the mansion the Circry House had purchased in Arumsaas, there was a storehouse.

It was littered with tools to be used around the house, but as it was to be used only through when Miranda would be attending the academy, it was quite empty.

In that space, I started making my golem with Poyopoyo.

The magic Damien taught me was generally one to manipulate dolls created with magic.

However, through using metals with your Mana poured into them, or specially manufactured parts, you wouldn't have to create a golem every time you wanted to use it.

Depending on the situation, a golem of dirt wasn't bad.

But creating one every time had quite a bad mana expenditure.

To reduce that, Damien made his dolls beforehand, and controlled them.

I thought I would make one for that purpose as well, but…

"It's hard to operate a humanoid one. No, there's extra things to take into account when they're not human form, though."

The doll I made with Poyopoyo made use of the armor donned by the boss of the fortieth floor.

There had been another one left at the academy as well. We managed to buy off the remains of the fortieth floor boss defeated a few years ago as well, and the golem we made with the metal wasn't in human form.

"I cannot fathom it. When you first told me, 'let's make a doll together,' I thought that was a new type of confession, but… we're really making one, are we?"

Well, with its form, it wasn't really a doll, but something else.

Poyopoyo took the armor out of her skirt, and after we finished processing the metal, we fitted legs onto it to complete it.

Six small wheels.

And four legs…

To move its folded legs, I tried sending magic into it.

The golem that looked as if legs had been stuck onto a small carriage was much sturdier than I had thought it would be.

"Oh, it gives off quite a durable feeling."

Because I wasn't used to the sensation of moving it around yet, the way its legs turned was still awkward.

I folded its legs back, and tried moving it forward on the wheels. When I tried having it round the corner with the wheels, it drew a wide curve.

When I first asked Poyopoyo if she could do it, the individual said something like, 'don't underestimate me, chicken dickhead,' and started drawing out the blueprints.

"It's to be expected. I mean, it's a fuselage this Poyopoyo before you worked on from planning to production. Should we name it bag holder no. 1?"

The golem hadn't been finished yet, but we were just moving around the piece that would form its base.

How much can it carry, and will we have a problem with maneuvering it in the labyrinth… I looked towards the two large shields propped against the wall.

The shields too large for a human to carry weren't fitted to be put to human use.

But that's how it should be.

We're not the ones who'll carry them.

“Once we make it able to deploy the shield system, we’ll be done. But we should give it a trial run in the labyrinth first.”

What sort of mana expenditure is to be expected?

And can it make the bends. We even attached legs onto it to make it possible to go up and down stairs.

Poyopoyo spoke.

“You need to load on some shocks to raise the stability. What’s more, there’s nothing on it that looks like a head, so I can’t form any endearment to it. That being the case, can I draw something facelike on the front side?”

“Is it really necessary? But this one… I guess it would be better if【Porter】were more endearing.”

As I called it the name I had thought up in advance, Poyopoyo shook as she loked between me and porter.

“What’s wrong?”

“… What’s with that name? What’s more, the fact that you just kinda thought of something fitting makes it all the more irritating. Even like this, I’m a specially made-to-order masterpiece, you know. For the machine I made in a few days to have a more proper name… dammit. What am I already losing to porter, dammit!?”

I picked up a book that had been lying nearby.

It’s a copied one I requested from Clara.

A book pertaining to names.

“It’s something I thought of while reading this book.”

When Poyopoyo looked at it, her face was mortified.

“And I thought you were wholeheartedly thinking of my name when you were reading it…!”

I directed a smile at her.

“Poyopoyo has already been established, so it’s fine as it is. It’s cute, you know, Poyopoyo.”

She swung around her twin tails in anguish.

Is she happy, or sad… as I thought, it’s complicated.

“I hate myself for feeling a little happy at that one! But I must object. Poyopoyo is temporary! I have a true name waiting for me out there! … Ha!? Could that line be one frequently used by pubescent youth in the eighth… Noooo!!”

I looked at Poyopoyo, and thought.

(Those ancients were definitely applying their efforts in the wrong places. What the hell were they trying to accomplish by making an automaton like this?)

The amused voice that came from the Jewel belonged to the Sixth.

『You guys sure get along.』

It seems that it appears the two of us get along.

While her mouth is bad, it’s true that she applies herself when I’m concerned.

I occasionally get the feeling I’m speaking with a real person, but the one before me is an automaton.

I turned to porter.

(If I’m forced to say, Poyopoy and porter are the same sort of item.)

Poyopoyo, who violently swung her twin tails as she covered her face in embarrassment.

Porter, who silently rested with its boxlike body on four legs.

(No, they’re completely different. Poyopoyo is Poyopoyo.)

I started considering when to run Porter’s trial run.

… Outside of Arumsaas, Lyra and Aria were moving together.

While Aria was lightly equipped, her left arm was covered with a metal protector.

Her right hand held a short spear, and she moved ahead of Lyra, aimingfor their destination.

Several sorts of knives hung at her waist, alongside the bag she kept her tools in.

Watching her from behind, Lyra had attached her prosthetic to her left arm.

While she tested its movements, she shouted out to Aria.

“Hey, don’t just look ahead. Make sure to keep tabs on the distance to your comrades.”

Aria twitched as if a jolt had run through her body, before she turned to Lyra with a wry smile on her face.

“I-I’m sorry.”

“Don’t apologize in the middle of moving. Repent after it’s all over. For the sake of you alone, you would halt the advance of your other comrades?”

Aria checked her surroundings in a panic, as she started walking forward.

Lyra’s style was one where she’d walk ahead as the frontmost line, and occasionally get into battle alone.

“Always think by yourself. How will the party move next? What is necessary? If you all can’t move without orders, then no matter how strong you get, you’ll be worse than second-rate.”

Havine reached the point designated as her destination, Aria ended up sitting on the ground from the unfamiliar movement stressing out her mind.

Seeing that, Lyra spoke.

“You, you said your leader didn’t recognize your strength, right?”

From the ground, Aria looked up at her.

“Yes. Well… he gives the orders, and I move by them. But I’m sure I can perform better than he thinks!”

Lyra gave an immediate reply.

“You’ve got the talent, so you’ll be fine to an extent. But still, if I was the leader, I’d do the same.”

Aria hung her head.

In Dalien, she had learned the basics of adventuring, but she had become negligent in that.

It was only proof that she had been relying on Lyle’s Skills too much.

“If you want me to say it, that leader’s a good one. Because he’s restricting his own Skills, and letting his party raise their own ability level. Could it be he noticed it? That at this rate, you’ll all become no good.”

Aria had been focusing on doing her best with all her might, but when she heard that, she thought that was exactly the case.

(The one who relied on Lyle’s excellence was me.)

Lyra pointed out numerous points for her to reflect on.

She had continued to repeat actions as if she had forgotten all she had learned in Dalien.

“In the first place. While the passageways may be wide to some extent, what guy out there would continue swinging around the same spear all the time? You should have noticed you need to either learn to use one that has adjustable height, or a short one.”

Aria was lectured once more.

Short spear… the weapon much shorter than Aria’s height had a lower reach, but it was easier to maneuver in the labyrinth.

The first words her instructor told her…

… She was worse than an amateur.

While she had strength to an extent, she got negligent, and abandoned her duty.

What Lyra mainly shouted at her for were the same things she had had learned from Zelphy.

Neglecting the basics of the basics, she was in a situation where she didn't even establish communication with her party.

"Anyways, how's the feel of using a shield?"

Aria looked at the small shield on her left arm.

At the buckler.

It had to be small in order for her to use her spear, but it was a help in that it could parry monster attacks.

"Yes. It's not a bad feeling."

As she said that, Lyra looked just a little happy.

"I see. Make sure to take care of your protectors too. They protect your body and your life. Don't be frugal with them."

With her left arm gone, and burns over her body, Lyra's words held weight.

"Now then, that's the end of break. Next I'll go up front, and show you how it's done. Make sure you watch for all the points I cautioned you on."

"Yes!"

Lyra walked ahead, and Aria followed from behind…

❼

… In one of the many private schools of Arumsaas.

It was there, that techniques pertaining to traps were taught.

The characteristics of Arumsaas' labyrinth, and the variants of traps set. As well as the method to open treasure chests, and other various things were taught.

It was information exclusive to Arumsaas, centered around whatever would be useful in that specific labyrinth.

And using that knowledge, Miranda skillfully opened the lock on top of the table. She dexterously moved her tools to display its contents.

Seeing that, her teacher hit his hands together.

"Amazing. It this really your first time? You aren't up to some mischief somewhere, right?"

Her hand movements were vivid enough to birth doubt.

Miranda replied with a smile.

"Of course not. How cruel, instructor."

Her teacher apologized.

Seeing her radient smile, he…

"… Then it's fine, I guess. In that case, do you want to try your hand at disarming traps next? Arumsaas' labyrinth doesn't have too wide a variety, so there isn't much to teach, though."

Generally, down to the lowest fiftieth floor, the variety of traps was low.

In that sense, it was a good place or young adventurer to start building up their power, and attaining competency.

"Starting now?"

"I'll need some preparation, so we'll leave it to next time. Let's end it here for today."

Hearing that, Miranda stood from her chair, gathered her belongings together, and left the classroom.

Watching her back were other young adventurers learning lock picking.

They looked quite smitten with her.

“She sure has it nice, that Miranda-san.”
“She graduated the academy, and became an adventurer, right? Want to try inviting her?”
“But I believe… she was working at that『Lyle, the Burden』’s place, right?”

As the students were getting lively, trying to see how to call out to Miranda, the teacher cleared his throat.

Silence returned.

And he told them to leave it at that.

He wasn’t joking. He was giving his students a serious warning.

“People of that type… especially female adventurers with talent in traps… it’s best to avoid them. If you’re in the same party, whatever you do, don’t try getting into a serious relationship with them.”

A single student asked.

“Why is that, teacher? Could it be you were put through hell by one in the past?”

To the student’s jest, the teacher replied with a serious face.

“… In the past, there was a large party. At that time, I was working as a trap expert. And then a woman skilled in traps entered our reserves.”

All the students left in the room were male, and as if their interests had been piqued, they were quietly listening.

It seems they were expecting it to become saucy.

Because young male adventurers were dreamers.

“She led a number of adventurers by the nose, and she wrung them all out and exploited them before throwing them away. She worked

in a number of parties, and I've heard tales from other specialists in my field, but… never try laying hands on that type of woman."

Hearing their teacher speaking with life experience, the students interests seemed a little dampened.

They hadn't gone through such a things, but it didn't look like the man was telling a lie.

It was all their own responsibilities.

The teacher was just offering them a warning.

"Just how many idiots so you think are out there that would pawn off their equipment for the sake of a woman? Your ulterior motives'll just be used up. And, girls of that sort… they'll get possession of their prey no matter the cost."

In this case, the prey was the opposite sex… a man. Hearing that, the stuents started quarrelling a little.

"If it was Miranda-san aiming for me, then I… would get married immediately."
"Retard, take a look in the mirror before saying something like that."
"Once is enough, so I want to be her prey~."

The teacher gave a hearty laugh as he looked over the young adventurers. He thought…

(It's as if they're being squeezed slowly by fine silk. By the time they notice it, they won't be able to move… I've seen plenty of men like that.)

While thinking of how nice it was to be young, the teacher restarted up his lesson…

❼

I took Porter and Poyopoyo along, and challenged the labyrinth to test my control.

After going up and down the stairs a few times, I gave Poyopoyo my

mace, and tried sending her into battle.

The goblin blown into the distance.

The goblin that had become a crimson stain on the wall.

The goblin painting the floor red.

… This girl isn't thinking of collecting the materials at all.

She was putting way too much strength into it, and the recovered items were in terrible states.

"To think that the techniques installed to combat the black demon of the kitchen would come in handy here…"[1]

She flipped back one of her side tails, and made a pose.

"What? That's how you were thinking of the poor goblins? And wait, you're putting too much force into crushing them. Our profits from selling off the parts is dropping."

The metal poles, and plates of armor had a set demand as pieces of metal.

They were to be melted down, so there wouldn't be a change in their value, but… the items collected from the goblins themselves were in a terrible state.

I put on gloves to collect the magic stones, and put the metal parts onto porter. When it was on its wheels, the extra weight didn't really change his mana cost.

There wasn't really a problem in having it go up or down steps either.

We weren't going to be diving too deep, so I tested in on the first and second floors.

Seeing that, the Third spoke.

『So this is the answer Lyle found.』

The Seventh agreed.

『It’s similar to what I and the fifth predicted.』

I was curious about those words, but wary of the adventurers approaching us, I drew my sabre.

Poyopoyo held up the mace in both hands.

“W-wait!”

“I’m sorry, but can you guys lend a hand?”

The worn out adventurers were dragging their feet as they requested assistance from us.

There were six in total. There were some among them supporting others on their shoulders, and some using all their might just to move. There was even an unconscious one.

Seeing their state, I approached them with my guard up.

They didn’t seem to be acting.

Poyopoyo spoke.

“His bone appears to be broken. There’s also some internal bleeding. It’s a serious injury, but… medicine and that magic thing should be able to take care of it. How strange.”

I wonder what she finds strange.

But I didn’t have the leisure to care about something like that.

From the bag atop Porter, I took out some medicine, and applied it to the injured one. The wounds closed, and his state improved a little from before.

But the people carrying him were also beaten up.

“I’m sorry. We had a surprise attack launched on us, and we tried fighting back, but…”

It wasn’t by monsters, but by adventurers, it seems.

“Thanks for the medicine. Even so… why is it a pushcart(?) and a maid?”

A pale faced adventurer stared at Porter and Poyopoyo in wonder.

“Well, stuff happens.

There, the injured one broke out into agony.

Poyopoyo spoke.

“This is bad. He hasn’t fully recovered. You should take him to a specialist.”

And I looked at Porter.

It was narrow, but there’s no doubt it could squeeze six onto it.

“The ride may not be the best, but please hop on.”

The saved adventurers…

“R-ride it? But sho’s going to push? If it’s you alone, then it’s a bit… there are stairs too…”

I thought there wasn’t the time to explain.

“Just get on with it already!”

Saying that, I rushed the six onto it, and stood on one of the parts protruding from its side.

Similarly, Poyopoyo stood on the opposite side, and…

“We’re off.”

The wheels started moving, and Porter began moving with eight in tow. I had remembered the way here, so I guided it down the labyrinth without hesitation.

The floor was also made of metal boards recklessly stuck over one another, and there was a little bit of shaking, but it was well within my tolerance level.

(Ah, this may be surprisingly useful for cargo.)

As I manipulated Porter, I thought that.

The riding adventurers looked upon the scene in mute amazement.

❼

Exiting the labyrinth, I drove to a nearby hospital, and waited outside.

Still with a pale face, but with bandages wraped around him, the saved adventurer came out.

Seeing me, he smiled.

“You’re a livesaver. All my comrades are safe as well.”

Hearing that, I felt relieved as having saved them.

“That’s good.”

Having adventurers help one another was essential.

There are some who are fine with bothersome behavior, but in most cases, those sorts fall to a miserable end.

And if I save them, then perhaps my reputation will recover a little.

“And so, well… I’m sorry!”

The adventurer shocked my by lowering his head.

He explained his current circumstances to me.

“Originally, this is where I’d be giving you gold coins. But my comrades are being hospitalized, so… when we were attacked, we kept the magic stones, but we were forced to leave behind everything else. This is all we have for now, but we’ll definitely make it up to you when we’re discharged.”

Saying that, the adventurer empties a bag of silver coins onto his hand, and handed them over to me.

Poyopoyo looked at that.

“For us two working on only the second floor, it’s a large sum.”

And said that.

I accepted the money.

“I’ve definitely accepted your thanks. Also, don’t push yourselves once you’re discharged. I’m satisfied with this as a reward already.”

“”T-thanks. Truly, thank you!

He may have been pretending this was all he had. In truth, I could have probably gotten more.

But in this case, rumors would spread of me being stingy, and my credibility would fall. And if I saved their lives, and didn’t accept a reward… if that information about me spread, then it would be a hindrance to my further work in Arumsaas.

Saying I was satisfied with that, I told him I wouldn’t accept any more.

The adventurer returned to his comrades, and I looked at the silver in my hand.

“… Ah, could it be this is…”

I noticed. At the same time, I heard the Fourth’s voice.

『The smell of money…』

I turned around to look at Porter. It lacked spirit, but its form was a reliable one.

At the same time, I heard a delighted voice from the Jewel.

『Lyle! Well done! That one can rake in the money! As I thought, it was important to have you think up a way on your own!』

The money grubbing Fourth noticed the value in my Porter.

Learning it could bring in money, he was delighted.

Poyopoyo spoke.

“Chicken bastard… with this, we’ll be able to pay for our meals, at least.”

I agreed.

“I think so too.”

Notes

1. black demon likely refers to the walking nuclear bombshelters

8 - Lyle’s Answer

Lyle’s Answer

We came to Damien’s research laboratory.

Today, we came with an unusual group of me, Novem, Aria, Miranda, Poyopoyo, and even Clara.

The reason we brought Clara along was because the Third was quite insistent.

At the lab, Damien looked at Porter, and watched it move around. Today’s objective was getting the opinion of Damien the Doll User.

Whether it was suitable for being baggage-carrier plus shield. We wanted his confirmation.

The fault of our party was that we didn’t have anyone to act as a shield in battle. At the same time, we weren’t able to move with a large amount of baggage.

When I thought of making a doll to compensate for our lack of manpower, the first question that came to mind was whether it had to be humanoid or not.

After looking over the golem, he came over to me.

For some reason, the three automatons who were usually cleaning the room, 【No. 1】, 【No. 2】, and 【No. 3】 were on standby near him.

Their eyes occasionally pointed at Novem.

“Do you plan on altering it any further than this?”

I nodded.

“I tried running several trials in the labyrinth, but I think it would be best if I upped the size.”

Porter was still an incomplete product.

I took it into the labyrinth several times to see what had to be improved on. That was something Poyopoyo firmly requested, so I carried out such tests.

“I think this is good enough as a prototype. Bu it really has been made to specialize on Arumsaas’ labyrinth, I’m doubtful of whether it would be useful elsewhere.”

Labyrinths vary greatly based on the location. With its relatively flat flooring, Arumsaas’ one was a relatively rare type.

But for now, we held clearing the thirtieth floor of this labyrinth as our goal. I think Porter’s fine like that.

If the need arises, I’ll make more improvements.

“I think I’ll go with a specialized type for now. So, what are your thoughts having moved it around?”

As he maneuvered Porter around the wide laboratory, Damien pushed up his glasses with his index finger.

“There shouldn’t be a problem for me or Lyle. I also doubt there’ll be a problem controlling it for any support more skilled than the main body of adventurers, but… it heally is a handful to useDamien told me there was a problem with its size.”

If I was the one using it, then that was fine, or so I thought…

From within the Jewel, I heard a voice

The Fourth was regretful.

『Damn, we’ll have to alter our plans. If we had Porter, I thought we could increase the popularity and demand for the golem magic all at once… but it looks like there’s a problem.』

Right.

The Fourth was delightfully putting together a plan to rake in money.

For that sake, he tried asking me to make it so other adventurers could use it.

“If it’s that library girl over there, then…”

Damien looked at Clara.

However…

“… No, I guess that’s no good. If you stick a shield onto it, then the load will increase even further. No, maybe just barely…”

Damien was lost in thought.

And Novem spoke.

“How about you try teaching Clara-san golem magic? She probably has an aptitude for it and all.”

Can he really just let other people learn his magic so easily?

That’s what I thought, but Damien followed her words.

“That’s right. It would be quicker just to test it. Library girl, I’ll teach you, so try using it.”

… He was that sort of guy.

Clara let out a sigh as she spoke.

“Hah… I never thought I would be being taught magic like this.”

Clara was taught golem magic, and after that, she tried utilizing Porter on the spot.

Seeing that, Poyopoyo…

“Ah, our Porter is… the fruit of me and that chicken’s love is…!”

Started putting on a play by herself, so I ignored her. Miranda-san looked on the scene, and gave her impression.

“Isn’t that nice? For it being your first time moving it around, I get the feeling it’s maneuvering nicely.”

Damien agreed.

“Yes, as that woman over there said, you have some talent.”

Hearing that, Aria spoke to him.

“That woman over there… Miranda-san was your student, wasn’t she?”

He turned back to Miranda-san, and…

“Was that so? Huh? I get the feeling I kinda know her, but kinda… I think a person like her would leave an impression in my memory, but how strange it is.”

He tilted his head in wonder, and Miranda-san started smiling.

“How cruel, professor. But how fitting of you. I’m relieved.”

I heard a voice from the Jewel.

It was the Fifth.

『It’s because the feeling she gave off changed all of a sudden. She’s started to draw wandering eyes. She’s quite reminiscent of Milleia, you know… her personality’s a little different, though.』

It seems her personality was slightly off, but these ancestors were equating her to Milleia-san more, and more.

Clara gave her thoughts.

“I can move it around, but feet, were they? When I try using those, it feels heavy. Normal useage isn’t a problem.”

Damien nodded.

“I remember your skill level. As a support, you’re about average, right? If it’s barely passable at that level, then you’ll have to make it smaller for a normal person to use. If you want to cut the Mana cust, then there are a few areas you should work on. But the wheels sure are nice.”

He praised it.

Poyopoyo grinned, as she took fleeting glances at the other three automatons.

They were making mortified expressions. I can't say anything but that these guys really had some complicated craftsmanship put into them.

And Damien reached his conclusion.

"If you want it to be usable by standard adventurers, it has to be more compact. Stairs are… can you make the legs shorter, and have it move in more of a creeping fashion? If you do that, it won't mover around too much."

When dolls and golems were concerned, Damien gave knowledgeable opinions.

Miranda-san spoke.

"In that case, for now, you'll continue to stay in the storeroom working on porter?"

I nodded, but before that, I had a few things planned.

"I'll make some improvements, but we'll be challenging the labyrinth in the near future. If I don't move around with a party soon, I feel that I'm going to forget that I'm an adventurer."

Recently, I'd been earning small change in the labyrinth.

If there were adventurers wanting to take heavy baggage in order to dive deep into it, I would load it onto Porter, and take it up to the fifth floor for them.

I took silver coins as thanks, and on the return back up, I would pick up other returning adventurers. I earned even more silver there.

The Fourth skillfully calculated the sum that the adventurers we met could pay, and we ran a business like that.

It wasn't just once or twice that I was asked to seriously tag along as support for gold.

And hearing those requests, the Fourth started considering changing our stock.

Damien looked at Porter.

“You’ve given me some new creative stimulus here. As I thought, you sure are interesting, Lyle. Oh, right… it’s about that boss’s armor, but there’s a whole piece that’s been left here. You’ll buy it, right? It’s in the way, so if you’ll take it off our hands, the academy will make it cheap.”

As long as there was enough left to study, they didn’t need any more, or so he said.

The materials they gained in large quantities from the boss was sold to me with Damien as an intermediary.

Novem spoke.

“Recently, Lyle-sama’s been earning a stable income, so we should be fine to an extent.”

Seeing her laughing to herself, I wanted to make an excuse, but I stopped myself.

A demon of small change was shouting out orders at me, so I didn’t have a choice. From my stance, it was fine as long as I could test out Porter.

The Fourth spoke.

『There’s still much, much more to come, but if you’re going to be working on Porter for a while, we’ll be on break for a while… even when we finally gained a stream of customers.』

While I was surprised at his abilities, I was an adventurer. I had some doubts about this method of making money, and I hadn’t even thought of putting Porter out on the market.

(I’ll have to talk to him later.)

While I thought that, I continued my talk with Damien.

Miranda and Aria had started talking about recent times.

“Aria, you’re atmosphere sure has changed as of late.”

“R-really? As I thought, I’m looking like more of an adventurer…”

“You’ve become quite manly, my dear.”

As Miranda said that with a smile, Aria returned.

“… You sure have a nice personality there. I never noticed.”

A smiling Miranda-san, and an angry Aria exchanged glares, and within that, Novem, Poyopoyo, and the other three automatons…

“Is something the matter?”

Looking at the four maids, Novem tilted her head. It was quite a cute gesture in my eyes.

Poyopoyo spoke.

“This vixen… that pose…”

No. 1 through three!

“She’s planned it all out! She must have planned everything!”
“What could this be? Why does my heart feel such animosity towards this woman!? You, just what are you!?”
“She’s definitely an insurmountable enemy for that piece of junk, Poyopoyo. So be it. We’ll be your opponent here!”

The three machines assumed predetermined poses, and Poyopoyo screamed out.

“Who’s a piece of junk!? The only one who’s allowed to call me that is my chicken dickwad! It’s time to scrap you all!”

I’m not sure where she took it out of, but she entered a battle stance with a drill in her hand.

Come to think of it, when were were making Porter, she said something like, ‘Drills and robots are a man’s romance.’

(It sure is lively here.)

Within the noisy laboratory, that’s all I could think.

And Clara…

“Um… could this mean that I’m being enlisted into the party?

Recently, I've been invited along as if it's natural, but I'm more of a solo temporary party member, you know… is anyone listening to me?"

❼

Late at night.

Having stopped by the room inside the Jewel, I asked what had been bothering me for a while.

It was about the answer I had reached.

In order to clear Arumsaas' labyrinth, I was using a golem to make up for our party's lack of members, and inadequacy in defense… I pretty much prepared a moving shield.

I heard in the past it was something different from the answers they were expecting.

For that sake, I wanted to ask the ancestors of their intentions.

The result…

"So it's that, right… there were countless ways from the start, right? You intentionally kept quiet about it, right?"

As I said that, the Second nodded, and explained.

『That's right. Personally, I was going for the 'earnestly use time to build up strength, and find dependable comrades' option. That Clara girl was in my aim. Keeping quiet about it was… I thought you would notice, but you didn't.』

The Third was interested in Clara as well.

『She sure has it nice, Clara-chan. She's a walking library, you know. She's definitely got a lot of wisdom on her. Ah, my plan was for you to just accompany another party, and beat up the boss alone. Getting to know a party that's relatively trustworthy, was the problem, but you could have just asked Clara-chan for that one.』

The Fourth's opinion was a bit out there.

『You could have just used money to hire manpower. Get guards, and have them escort you to the thirtieth floor. From my position, if you got to see other skilled adventurers up close like that, and learned from them, I was fine with permitting my Skill's use and all.』

What I was lacking.

All I had to do was notice that, or so the Fourth said. No, to be more specific, there were just some things I had to learn in an environment where I couldn't use Skills.

The Fifth's answer was close to mine.

『I was thinking of using golems to make up for your lack of people. Defense… prepare nothing but a shield, and deploy it in battle to increase safety. A plan to instantly set up a defensive encampment within the labyrinth. Quite simple, quite certain.』

That did sound right. I ended up nodding.

It didn't sound like the opinion of an adventurer, but it was wise. I'll keep that in mind.

The sixth had a similar one.

『My thoughts on the matter were the same, but I thought of making golems with simple designs, and simply using them to up your numbers. There's also doing that with money and people.』

Finally, the Seventh…

『I was watching just how you were to approach your objective, and once you realized the problems, how you planned to go about resolving them… I'm serious, you know? By the way, my answer was just putting out a request to subjugate the floor boss. I did think of Golems too, though.』

Hearing that, I ended up shouting.

"No, in the first place, what about communication with my comrades, and those other important points!"

I thought that, but the ancestors were grinning.

The Second spoke.

『In regards to our challenge, we wanted to see how you would go about clearing it. Seeing you earnestly tackling the problem isn't a bad sight.』

The third…

『Lyle, expand your field of vision more. While we were leading you to think the way you did, the problem we presented was, 'Return after defeating the thirtieth floor boss without Skills.' If you just want to look at the extremes… you could do absolutely nothing but defeat the boss, and have left all of the rest to hired adventurers, you know.』

The Third laughed.

Then what the hell did they mean that it would be terrible at this rate when they put the restrictions on my Skills? As I made a dissatisfied face, the Fourth spoke.

『Hey, don't be so mad. It's true that we wanted to see how you planned on approaching the problem, and you ended up noticing more problems than we anticipated you would. Also, you even thought of a new way to use a golem, right? If you did nothing but listen to our words, Porter would never have been born.』

It seems they wanted to see how I would think and act on it. As a result, I ended up giving an answer they were satisfied with.

Not that I'm satisfied with that.

Looking like he was having more fun than usual, the Fifth spoke to me.

『The concept is good. It's also nice that you've realized the necessity of a shield. With this, if you can safely clear the thirtieth floor, it's a pass.』

If I could do it, that is.

That doesn’t mean I’ve passed anything yet.

The Sixth answered to my discontent.

『Lyle, there’s never a single way to approach a problem. In truth, even using up years to steadily build up all your abilities was a single correct answer. But similarly, hiring people was but another correct one. Well, we did lead you to misunderstand.』

The Seventh apologized.

『I think you understand, but there are plenty of loopholes in this world. There will come a time when a frontal attack won’t get you anywhere. Also…』

The Second took over the explanation.

『Noticing your current problems, and working to better them has already made you achieve our aim. If you continued on oblivious, we would have presented a different challenge.』

Seeing me unsatisfied with that, the ancestors smiled.

The Fifth spoke.

『You realized your faults, and bettered them. Even for problems we didn’t notice, you relied on Clara to reach an answer. I have a few complaint over how you’re too reliant, but that isn’t a mistake.』

I tried asking everyone.

“Um, so you’re saying any method would have been fine? Even if I didn’t notice a single problem, and ignored them, yet still managed to clear the task?”

The Third nodded.

『Right. If you go to extremes, that would have worked too. Of course, that’s only if you had enough power on you to get through it without paying mind to such glaring flaws.』

But the Sixth spoke.

『It’s just that if you lost your footing there, we would never have

permitted the use of Skills again. Lyle, you seriously grappled with the challenge we presented, and presented a response we're satisfied with, is all it means. Now go put it to practice, and show your worth.』

There were some parts I could nod at, and some parts I found iffy.

"You never thought I would push myself too far, and fail?"

The Second informed me with a serious expression on his face.

『If you were to die from something of this level, then that means that's just your level. Your talent, comrades, environment… if you were hopeless with all those backing you, then you'd just become hopeless further down the line, and get annihilated.』

The force of his words shut me up, and the Third followed up.

『Don't worry. Everyone here is waiting, and looking forward to how you'll fare, Lyle. We presented the task thinking you could do it. If we thought it was hopeless, I doubt we would have placed so much expectations on you in the first place.』

No, that didn't help anything.

These guys are being quite overbearing today.

Just what do they want me to do?

In the end, the Fifth scratched his head as he spoke.

『Each and every one of them… Lyle, it's your life. Obviously, there's no one who's going to present an answer but you. How you take things in, and how that leads to an answer. That's for you to decide.』

On his words, I remembered what the First had told me.

【Lyle… have you decided on your goal yet?】

I remembered a prickling painful sensation in my heart.

(My answer…)

9 - Porter

We met as planned, and challenged the labyrinth for the first time in a while.

Our members were me, Novem, Aria, Miranda, Clara, Poyopoyo, and Porter.

I stationed Porter at the center of our formation, and Aria at the front.

Having gone through several modifications, Porter now had a roof attached by thin pillars extending from the loading area.

Weather is irrelevant in the Labyrinth.

But it was attached in order to prevent the luggage from taking damage during battle.

“Should I have just made it a box?”

Rather than light weight, perhaps I should have focused on making it sturdy. As I said that, Poyopoyo put her hand to her chin.

“More than that, instead of deploying a Shield out front, something more offensive… how about sticking a spike to make Porter an attack type? Destroy enemies and traps in your way as you push forward!”

Hearing that, I thought that perhaps that would have been fine, for a moment, but I soon started shaking my head.

We can’t have the machine carrying our precious baggage going on the attack, and possibly being destroyed.

Clara put her hand to her forehead, and spoke.

“… What would you do if you dragged other adventurers into it? That’s definitely no good.”

But the large lantern attached to Porter felt like a good addition.

It kept down Clara's Mana cost.

In exchange, it took money to light.

It lighted the passageways, but the fact that it couldn't be extinguished and relit frequently was a problem.

Aria stopped ahead, and signaled that there were enemies around the turn ahead.

"Quiet down a little. I have to listen carefully here."

Novem was to Porter's side, and Miranda was across from her.

Clara was walking ahead.

Its rear was open, but when it came to it, that space was one to hide and take cover in.

In that case, building it sturdy would have been preferred.

Within the passageways made of metal sheets irresponsibly layered over one another, as Aria said, I definitely did hear footsteps.

I gave out orders.

But it was different than before.

"Novem, prepare your magic. Once you've fired off a round, me and Aria will finish off the rest. If they get through, Miranda, protect those two. Poyopoyo keep watch of the rear."

In a tone indicating her reluctance to be assigned to the rear alone, Poypoyo…

"Even when I can clearly see them in darkness… even when I can take out those numbers immediately…"

Started complaining.

I know she could do it, but this time's expedition was to see how far we could go with these members.

Throwing Poyopoyo into battle between the first and third floors would be contradictory to that objective. At the same time…

“It takes money to have you fight.”

A voice from the Jewel affirmed that. It was the money grubbing fourth.

『Yeah, that’s important. When the expedition itself costs money, having the automaton get damaged in the slightest will cut our income… hah, the efficiency would be better if you were still earning normally from carrying baggage.』

He was referring to when I used Porter to carry adventurers to their destinations, or recovering them when they were headed back.

That one gave out quite some good payout.

Adventurers headed further down were able to travel with ease.

Returning adventurers wouldn’t have to carry their heavy luggage in their tired states. Depending on the case, they were exceedingly happy at having found a ride.

Both cases didn’t take up too much time, and with the round trip I was able to earn sums equal to whole gold coins.

(… But I think the Fourth’s normal is a little bit off.)

He isn’t wrong, but it’s far removed from the type of adventurers I imagine.

It’s true that Porter brought in money, but that was merely the means, and not the goal.

The Fifth cautioned him.

『… It’s not your money, you know, damn miser.』

The Fourth responded.

『Earnings are important, right!? In order to live, it’s no good if you don’t bring in money!』

He wasn’t wrong.

But on that opinion, the Sixth…

『That's only if you actually use the money. Needlessly stocking it up, it's not like you'll take it to the other world with you when you're dead.』

Even if you had a treasure hoard, there was no meaning if you couldn't use it skillfully.

In that sense, I think I want to become a person who can use money well.

The Fourth was just good at bringing it in.

He ascertained the limit the adventurers we met would willingly pay, and negotiated to lower prices. By stepping back here, we were able to take in money in the end.

As I was thinking that, monsters appeared from the passage.

Goblins armed with metallic weapons came out with the numbers Aria specified.

Finishing her preparations, Novem…

"Fire Bullet!"

Fired off multiple orbs of fire, causing the enemies to falter. Even if they blocked with their armaments, they would still receive burns.

Aria stepped out front alongside me.

She was carrying along a spear shorter than before, and held out a small shield upfront as she parried enemy attacks, and destroyed their footing.

Like that, she thrust out her spear wherever there wasn't any metal.

It was different than her style up to now, and she stopped swinging in wide arcs.

(That makes things easier.)

With not the mace, but a sabre in hand, I turned half my body to dodge a goblin's attacks, before cutting at its throat.

With blood rushing from its neck, the goblin fell to the ground with a dull metallic sound. The other goblin that tried to get away from the two of us was dealt with the other sabre I drew with my left hand.

“Ah…”

Letting out a careless voice, the goblin’s head fell to the ground as blood continued to spill from its neck.

The surroundings were died red.

Luckily, the only ones who were dirty were me and Aria.

Aria spoke.

“… Hey, if you get blood everywhere like that, I’m going to slip.”

She sure has gotten sturdy.

Before quite a brutal scene, she seemed quite used to it, and her only thoughts were that she would slip… I find it a little sad she’s nothing like a noble Lady anymore.

“Sorry about that. No, really…”

Seeing my questioning expression, Aria seemed confused.

“Why are you making a face like that?”

When the battle ended, Clara approached to pick off anything that could be turned to money. The tools to pick them off were also loaded on Porter, so she was only carrying a small portion of equipment herself.

The metal was also tossed onto its loading cart.

Aria kept watch of the front, and Miranda-san the back.

I assisted Clara, and confirmed with Novem.

“Novem, are you tired at all?”

If a magician expended physical strength, they would also lose mental power. Controlling Mana brought way to mental fatigue.

When magicians were acting as the offense of a party, it was correct to constantly confirm their statuses.

The conditions change by the day, so it's essential for a leader to communicate with their party, apparently.

I doubted she would be tired after just one use, a she directed a smile at me.

"I'm alright, Lyle-sama."

"I see… then once we're done collecting, we'll continue moving."

I held Novem back from helping, and me and Clara alone finished, after which we resumed moving.

Just as before, I left battle to aria.

(She's keeping a lookout without being told anything, so I can talk normally.)

In the past, I relied on Skills, and was able to somehow get an understanding of my comrades' states.

Because of that, there was little to talk about between us.

(Conversation… I can't remain poor at them.)

I called out to Clara.

"Clara, are you fine with controlling Porter?"

"Yes. As long as the movement speed is kept to a certain level… but stairs are enervating. I don't have to keep up the light, so it is a good tradeoff, though."

It seems that the individual herself was mildly discontent that she couldn't regulate the lighting herself.

(I'll leave that as next time's challenge.)

As I also struck up conversation with Miranda-san.

"Your movements sure are getting better, Miranda-san."

As I said that, she spoke with a smile.

“Thank you. If only you weren’t so sarcastic, I might have actually been happy here.”

I let out some dry laughter, and confirmed she was doing fine, before going to Poyopoyo last.

For some reason, she seemed annoyed.

The Second spoke.

『For an automaton, this one sure is a pain in the ass.』

She’s probably unsatisfied with how she’s not being of use.

Her facial expressions were more plentiful than a normal human.

“Hah… I’ll put you to work during our break, so endure it until then.”

She produced a frypan, and some other cookware as she spoke.

“Leave it to me. From cooking to rest, I’ll do it all to perfection!”

… I’m not actually expecting anything too extravagant within the labyrinth.

But Poyopoyo seemed overly motivated.

“No, we don’t need anything all too refined…”

And after finishing my conversations, I continued to pay mind to our surroundings.

❼

The spot we chose for our break was of a moderate size to spend a night.

Without monsters around, we unloaded some supplies off of Porter, and began making food.

Motivated all by herself, Poyopoyo prepared soup.

She baked bread, and put something like ham atop it.

For food found in a labyrinth, it was of a higher-class variety. It was usually just some thick soup, and whatever bread one had brought on hand. In order to reduce unnecessary baggage, we wouldn't bring the tools necessary to make anything too extravagant.

But we could just load cookware onto Porter, so as long as we kept our numbers low, then luxuries like these were possible.

Currently, Miranda-san was keeping watch.

Having finished eating, Novem and Clara went to sleep.

Poyopoyo divided out Miranda's portion, and stayed by it, as if she was waiting to serve it fresh.

As Aria ate alongside me, I spoke.

"… One…"

"What is it?"

"After coming this far, you've only made a single mistake"

She hurriedly started to make an excuse.

"I-I made sure to reunite with the group after that! And wait, you remembered? You sure are an incessant man."

Seeing her fly into a rage, I responded.

"No, I'm saying that's the only time you've made any sort of error. If you think back to how we were a few months ago, your movements are completely different… Even when we're moving together, it's become much easier to fight."

Hearing that…

"… I see. I'm sorry about that."

Resuming her meal, Aria seemed a little happier. After that, we continued talking together now and again, before I let Aria go to sleep first.

The one who had to use her senses most when we were on the move was Aria. During breaks, I wanted to take her off lookout duty to prepare for tomorrow.

After she had fallen asleep, I muttered.

“It’s worlds away from how it was before. Though our numbers are higher now, I guess.”

Hearing that, Poyopoyo…

“Are you talking to yourself? You sure are a lonesome master. I’ll hear you out. Please unload any worry you have onto me. I’ll be sure to turn it into a joke to tease you later.”

“That doesn’t make me happy at all, you know?”

I sat atop one of our wooden crates, and talked with her. Rather than consultation, it was closer to affirmation.

Affirming my own thoughts.

“The last time we challenged this place together was the worst. Aria was always close to tears, and we could only bring trouble to Clara. Even when Novem would be better off making her own decisions, I tried ordering everything down to the finer details… but it didn’t get us anywhere.”

Poyopoyo spoke.

“You’ve grown, chicken dickwad. From today onwards, I’ll promote you to a useless chick.”

“Oy, that isn’t growing at all. The hells with the chick part?”

I turned my eyes towards the sleeping three, and Miranda-san.

“After coming this far… good grief, this is why gentlemen are…”

“Don’t misunderstand or anything. Also, why are you trying to remove your clothing? If you want to sleep, then go ahead and do so, I’ll slap you awake later.”

“Tsk, so you’re still just a chicken dickhead, are you? From my light

exhibitionism, that weak attitude and manner… I'll definitely have you wrapped around me one day."

"Oh, so wanted to be strangled? Go to sleep already."

As I said that, Poyopoyo let her twin tails sway, as she said something like, 'No, no, I want to hear the rest.'

… I wonder what it is. While her outer appearance held some charm, her insides didn't match at all.

"Today went quite well. While there were some problematic points, we were all generally proficient. It's just as Clara said."

Poyopoyo seemed satisfied with that.

"When you were marketing out Porter, I did take a look at the other adventurers… truly, everyone's movements were good when looked at individually. However, party, was it? When assigned to a platoon, your movements suddenly become worse."

It's because for now, everyone's only focusing on their own roles.

A party's coordination isn't something that polishes itself immediately. Individual movements and decisions are different.

We have to confirm our coordination time and again, and match our movements to complete our party.

"Right. I've talked to many a leader, but rather than stressing on abilities, they all valued whether people could work together."

Through talking to people atop Porter, my relations to the adventurers of Arumsaas increased in an instant.

We talked on the way, and it's nice that I was able to see other parties' movements.

Methods varied widely by the party, but those that honored the basics felt more successful.

I did it to learn Porter's applications, and controls, but I was surprisingly able to acquaint myself with quite a few people of Arumsaas.

A majority of them called me something like『Lyle, the Burden』, and I gave them a bitter smile, but that was also the envy of an adventurer.

Usually, for one to get a decent moniker, means that you're the admiration and fear of others.

I'm much too young, so it isn't something too great.

But it turned into a topic of conversation, so it was actually a help to me to stick it into idle banter. I'm not the best at talking to others, but with just one topic like that, communication became much easier.

(If you think of it like that, it doesn't sound too bad… being called a burden.)

Apparently, seeing me surrounded by beauties, and having them treat me dearly caused some discontentment among male adventurers.

There were even some that thought the fact we were able to breach the fortieth floor was solely due to Damien's dolls.

But I can't say that's wrong.

We did stand firm in the boss battles, but in places apart from that, Damien's dolls standing as moving shields was really a help.

I looked at Porter.

"… Porter sure is a good comrade."

I whispered that, and Poyopoyo…

"Of course. He's the fruit of mine and your love. But in the near future, my name… not a temporary one, please decide on a true name for me. I'm seriously frustrated at losing to Porter. Those mass produced scraps are mocking me to high heavens!"

I looked at her with my head tilted.

"Did they really say that much? Why not just talk back? That you're different from them, on a higher level?"

“This is why men who are fooled by docile exteriors are… those ones truly have terrible mouths, you know. I don’t even come close! I, the chicken dickwad’s angel have been brought to tears! Please do a better job of protecting me!”

I spoke.

“Crying and all… don’t you just complain?”

With a sorrowful expression on her face, she bend her knees, and sat down on the spot.

She started quietly singing a mournful song, but I was shocked at her vocal skill level.

(This one really can do a lot of things… is there any reason she’s so obsessed on being a maid?)

For what purpose did those ancients make Poyopoyo… I simply couldn’t comprehend.

10 - Preparations to Conquer

Preparations to Conquer

“Ye~ah, how about something like this?”

Making modifications to Porter, me and Poyopoyo looked over it with the intentions of putting him together for real this time.

But no matter what, we weren’t able to decide on the important finishing touch.

“That’s a little… how about something like this?”

Poyopoyo was also worried. She was hard pressed on the completion of the machine she called the fruits of our love, and thus, she presented ideas alongside me.

The ancestors within the Jewel also gave their fifty cents.

The Second…

『Oy, oy, are you really sure about putting it there? The balance will definitely be off.』

In contrast to his usual self, the Third sounded serious.

『No, how about the opposite side? Even if looking at it gives a sense of discomfort, taking the balance of the whole body into consideration…』

The Fourth spoke.

『… Wouldn’t it usually just go in the middle? I can’t have it any other way.』

The Fifth, who usually didn’t hold a shred of interest, was also serious.

『Hey, Lyle… put on some cat ears. That will definitely make it cuter.』

The Sixth opposed him.

『What are you on about!? It's horns, you know. Horns! Lyle, a man has got to put on horns!』

The Seventh took the middle ground.

『Just randomly stick on some horns, or ear-like things. What's important is for it to have clear eyes!』

The round cylinder in my hands had two clear, lovable eyes stuck onto it. Poyopoyo had embedded orbs of glass into them.

Right.

We couldn't decide the placement of the head.

Within the warehouse, Aria, who had recently become much manlier, looked over us with a sigh.

I know she's fed up. But after coming this far, there's no way we would forgive erring on the last detail.

With a tired tone, Aria opened her mouth.

"Do you even need a head? It's just an ornament, isn't it? Then just stick it somewhere suitable.It's not even essential in the first place, right?"

She was sound.

She wasn't wrong.

And that's exactly where she was wrong.

Poyopoyo laughed scornfully, before speaking.

"For the current you, are those breasts of yours not a useless ornament as well? Recently, you've become more and more manly, former baron house Aria-san."

She put her hand to her mouth, and raised an annoying laugh that sounded like she was intonating it on purpose.

I looked at Aria with all earnesty.

“Aria, we’re serious here. I’d like it if you didn’t get in the way.”

I heard affirming voices from the Jewel.

Second onward…

『Shut it, girly!』
『Cat ears… horns are denied, but ears may be nice.』
『With appearance, playing it safe is best! Make it lovable, and have it earn some popularity. Don’t do anything unnecessary!』
『Rabbit ears are nice too.』
『Why are horns no good…』
『No, why not just simply keep it at where you have it now? If you awkwardly stick on horns and ears, its adoring eyes won’t stand out any more.』

… No, I was wrong.

Besides the Second, none of them were even listening to Aria.

I tried to follow up with her. I was starting to find her a little pitiable. Of course, I doubt she thought of herself like that at all.

She was currently glaring at Poyopoyo with a vein surfacing on her forehead.

“… I’m sorry, Aria. But we’re earnestly worrying about it here. This is important for Porter… for our new comrade.”

Poyopoyo looked at me, raised her hands into the air, and started hopping up and down. Her twin tails lightly floated into the air.

“Yes, yes! I, here, am also a member of the chicken dickhead’s merry amazoness legion! I’m everyone’s soothing maid automaton! So I think my name is also an essential point!”

This time, Aria laughed in scorn.

“Hah, isn’t Poyopoyo just fine, you piece of junk?”

Poyopoyo looked at her.

“So you picked a fight with me… so be it. I’ll more than take you up. From today onwards, your meals will be nothing but high calorie. I’ll

gradually increase your body mass, and make you overly conscious of it. What's more, I'll even secretly prepare midnight snacks to sooth your anxiety. I'll earnestly put myself to making delicious sweets for you!"

I tilted my head wondering if that would actually do anything.

When I looked at Aria's eyes, I found her making a bitter expression.

The Second spoke.

『It's that. Aria's been feeling up lately.』

"That's damn unfair!"

Poyopoyo smiled. It was a detestable grin.

And I thought.

(This one… she can even make an expression like that. Praise be to the ancients.)

Poyopoyo lifted up one of her tails idly, as she spoke.

"Unfair? Are you trying to praise me? For that bastard over there, I'll use any means at my disposal! … Ow!"

I struck her head with Porter's. It let out quite a fine sound.

"Don't be making it my fault. More importantly, where will Porter's head…"

Aria spoke.

"How about that area right there? You can't just incessantly mull over it forever…"

Both me and Poyopoyo looked at the end of Aria's finger in shock.

"Nice, you're amazing, Aria! With this, the location of Porter's head has been set in stone. Thank you."

When I directed a smile at her, her face became conflicted. Was she trying to be happy, or annoyed… how complex.

“N-no. As long as you’re happy with it… Hoh?”

Poyopoyo also nodded.

“I hate to admit it, but rather than the front end… rather than the complete center, that spot is definitely splendid.”

The ancestors also spoke up.

『That girl’s surprisingly competent.』
『So all that’s left is the ears…』
『Wunderbar! Appearance and profitability are directly correlated! Like this, we’ll definitely have some popularity among the customers!』
『To hell with the location. The problem is what ears you’re putting on it!』
『And horns are still no good…』
『We don’t need any of you guys’ unnecessary junk. If the the head is going to be near the edge, then your strange ornaments will only be a nuisance!』

I started fastening it.

Through operating it with magic, the head could move. With a ball-like joint placed around the neck, it was possible to manipulate it to an extent.

The make of the head Poyopoyo spent a day working on was truly magnificent.

“Perfect!”

“Porter… my, how you’ve grown…”

I praised our workmanship, and Poyopoyo’s eyes started tearing up. Aria looked over us with a doubtful expression.

Having been further specialized to Arumsaas’ Labyrinth, Porter’s body had become lower, and the horizontal width of its wheels wider.

Around the wider wheels, Poyopoyo had wrapped a sort of rubber she had on hand. When looked upon from above, they were

rectangular, and they were able to make the turns in the corridors of the labyrinth with a little space to spare.

The space to load luggage was equipped with a roof, and the metal sheets on its sides could act as shields.

Its frontside was heavily armored, and it was even capable of blocking up the passageways. The legs attached onto it to traverse stairs had grown much shorter than before.

But by expanding its side shields outwards, pushing those feet downwards, it could make for a fine wall.

The lantern stuck onto its ceiling was also modified for it to be possible to regulate the light.

I think this was all a little overkill.

Poyopoyo spoke.

“I wanted to make the shield a separate piece.”

I agreed, but I had to reject the notion.

“There was no helping it. I’m going to be driving it alternatively with Clara, so while I’m one thing, she’s…”

She can control one body, but if there are two it would become difficult.

We tried borrowing a small doll to test it, but it didn’t work out well.

“I’ll also be participating in battle. Depending on the situation, I may end up using magic. With that in mind, there’s nothing we can do about it.”

I had completed the plans to use Porter to compensate for our lack of members, but we still have a fundamentally low number of combatants.

While me and Poyopoyo were having an earnest discussion, Aria spoke.

“… And wait, why are you putting so much effort into a baggage

carrier doll that can only be used here anyways?”

Hearing that, I, Poyopoyo… and the ancestors all at once.

“It’s Porter!”

“At least remember the name. The fruit of our love, and one that boasts a name much more splendid than mine own, Porter!”

『『『It’s Porter, dammit!』』』

After I had cone a while spending all my time and efforts on it, even the ancestors started developing an attachment.

You sure are popular, Porter.

❼

… At the Arumsaas guild, Novem had stopped by to submit the paperwork to challenge the labyrinth.

Miranda and Shannon were with her.

Chewing on the tip of her finger, Shannon’s eyes were teary.

To finish registering as an adventurer, she had pricked it with a needle to record her blood onto her guild card. She was shaking through the process.

“Why do I have to become an adventurer, anyways!? I’m still thirteen, you know! I’m ridiculously weak…”

Hearing that, Miranda put her hands onto her sister’s shoulders.

Her smiling figure made it look as if she was an elder sister comforting her sibling. They were a pair with good looks going for them, so it was an image that would make for a nice painting.

Among those looking upon the two, there were even some who felt their hearts warmed.

But…

“Hey, you, do you plan on staying like that forever? That ain’t happening… those who don’t work, don’t eat, you know.”

Still smiling, her fingers started digging into Shannon’s shoulders, and Shannons frantically shook her head up and down.

“O-of course, that’s exactly right, Onee-sama! I was in the wrong!”

Novem was holding two blank forms in hand.

The first was for their full blown attempt at the labyrinth in a week.

She had filled in their intent to proceed to the thirtieth floor on that one, and the second one was one to request permission for Shannon to accompany them there.

No one intended to have Shannon fight.

But they couldn’t just leave her home alone for who knows how long. Also, considering the girl’s future, it was something Miranda decided.

The daughter of a viscount house… but with a defect in her eyes, she was driven away to Arumsaas. That was Shannon’s official position.

Novem spoke to the two of them.

“Both of you, once we’ve submitted the forms, we’ll be entering the labyrinth to conduct some tests for Porter with Lyle-sama. Have you finished preparing?”

Shannon wasn’t used to the labyrinth.

It had its characteristic oppressing air within it.

In order to accustom her, they were going to take her along this time.

(If it looks like she won’t be able to handle it, since she can’t stay alone in the mansion, we’ll find her some place to room at.)

There was no way they would leave a single weak girl in the vvast mansion.

The necessary supplies to challenge the labyrinth were already prepared. They had already placed in an order for the required foodstuffs, so all they had to do was pick it up.

While observing porter's tuning, if Shannon ended up unable to stand the atmosphere, she would be left.

Of course, everyone planned on doing that in the first place. The only one who wanted to take her along was Miranda.

"We're prepared already. Shannon, make sure you listen to whatever your senior support says. Got it?"

Shannon responded.

"I don't want to carry luggage. Also, I don't like the sticky feeling… is there perhaps a bath there? Hiii! That was a lie! I'll properly listen to whatever that glasses girl says!"

Miranda made a clenched fist, and smiled harder, so Shannon accepted in fear.

Novem felt a little uncomfortable having Miranda dragging her sister out against her will.

After she finished submitting the forms at the receptionist desk, she moved to leave the building in order to meet up with Lyle.

On the way ont, some adventurers who realized they were Lyle's party members tried calling out to them.

On the stairs out, they met a party of three.

There, Novem remembered Rondo's party she had become acquainted with in Dalien.

"Oh, are you the『Burden』's comrades? Hey, when is he going to be renting out Porter next?"
"That burden? Hey, isn't his party a gathering of beauties? No wonder that story spread so far."
"Oy, you're troubling them. Sorry about that. Can you pass on the message that we'll be counting on him next time?"

Novem said her greeting, and parted with them when Shannon spoke.

“What? So he’s called the『Burden』? How fitting.”

Miranda’s clenched fist came down on her head.

Shannon started writhing around in pain.

As Novem was troubled by the sight, Miranda called over to her.

“He sure is popular.『Lyle, the Burden』… even when he’s the one carrying their baggage, what a strange moniker.”

Novem spoke.

“It’s a bout of cynicism fitting for an adventurer. Also, the image of Lyle-sama returning on our shoulders from clearing the fortieth floor must have left a strong impression.”

While Novem offered as harmless a response as possible, Miranda suddenly made a serious face as she surveyed the area.

Noticing her motion, Novem noticed a suspicious figure in her line of sight.

(… So that’s why Miranda-san is trying to take Shannon-chan along.)

For the past few days, Novem had also sensed the presence of someone watching her.

She had thought it was because Lyle had become a famous topic within the city, but it seems there was something more malicious at play.

(… We should avoid moving alone. I’m worried about Aria-san.)

Aria was receiving instruction from an adventurer.

That seems to have ended, but in order to talk, she would still stop by that adventurer’s place.

The individual herself seemed to be enjoying It, so Novem wouldn’t stop her, but she would caution her.

At some point in time, Miranda's eyes had fallen on Novem.

"… Somehow you give off the feeling you already noticed it."

Novem offered a bitter smile.

As her conversation partner was remaining vigilant of her, she was troubled with how to deal with her.

"No, I was merely looking at where your eyes were pointing, Miranda-san."

"I see… Shannon, how long are you going to be in pain? Let's go already."

Miranda's eyes remained in doubt.

But even receiving that, Novem's emotions didn't experience any change. She simply thought of her as a candidate of Lyle's harem.

Taking the pained Shannon along, Miranda continued down the guild's stairs…

❼

Having come into the labyrinth to carry out tuning on Porter, I looked at Shannon.

"What?"

"No, are you in pain or anything? Like isn't it a little hard to breath? Normally, it's rough when you experience this atmosphere for the first time."

As I said that, she looked at me in scorn.

Sitting on Porter's roof, she let her legs sway back and forth.

"The density of the Mana around here seems high, but what of it?"

Even when she had gotten worn out from walking, and retired to Porter's roof, she managed to put up quite a strong front.

“Oy, don’t kick your legs about too much. And why did you even enter the labyrinth in a skirt? I can see the contents.”

When I cautioned her, Shannon raised her voice.

“Noooo, Onee-samaaa! This man is peeping up my skirt!”

While she tried speaking ill of me, Poyopoy was in the middle of working on fine tunings.

Clara seriously looked over her, and didn’t even listen to Shannon’s words.

Aria was on standby at the entrance of the room we entered to conduct adjustments.

“It’s because you came in a skirt to begin with. Are you even trying? And wait, that scrap metal is wearing one two. She’s not shown her underwear once, though.”

It was truly a manly opinion.

Poyopoyo turned to Aria, and spoke.

“Why do I have to provide fanservice to you? The only one to look over my undergarments is to be that chicken over there.”

I replied instantly.

“I’m not interested in the slightest, so just put on some pants already.

She yelled in response.

“You’re telling me to discard this attire, and wear something else!? This is my uniform, and my battle suit… this garb can even pierce through a battlefield!”

… What is this girl even saying?

And Novem addressed Shannon.

“He can’t see from that angle, so don’t worry about it Shannon-chan.”

In order to prevent her from having any misconceptions, I offered a

revision.

“No, I didn’t have any intentions of looking. In the first place, I’m not even interested in that girl’s undergarments.”

There, Shannon threw her shoe at me. It hit my face, and kinda stung.

I ended up thinking something like, ‘this girl has talent,’ or something along those lines.

“What do you mean by ‘that girl’!? Even like this, we were called the alluring sisters back at Centralle! I’ve even heard people say they wanted to protect me and my ephemeral disposition, you hear!”

From the Jewel, the Third let out his voice.

『Both of these girls are good at putting up a front. I can’t wait to meet the second and third daughters.』

For some reason, I imagined the forms of the Fifth and Sixth awkwardly staying silent.

As we were on break, Miranda-san was taking a swig of water from her canteen.

Her way of drinking somehow made me feel locked down by her gaze. She was just sipping water normally, but my eyes wandered towards her.

She spoke to Shannon.

“If you wanted him to see them so badly, then you can’t keep wearing that kiddy stuff forever. How about we get a little bolder?”

As she laughed at her own jest, Shannon’s face turned red.

And as she reached to reclaim the shoe she had thrown, she whispered to herself.

The way she received it with her eyes locked on the ground truly gave off the sense that she could see better than a normal person.

“This can’t be my kind sister…”

I responded.

“And what were you trying to do to that kind sister?”

While thinking our newly added member was too rowdy, I looked towards Miranda, and thought.

(If Shannon didn’t do anything, the current Miranda-san wouldn’t exist, right? … I wonder which would be best.)

I was just a little lost in thought.

11 - Conquering Commence

We conducted a few trial runs, and completed adjustments on Porter, so I went over to the smithery in order to fetch my own weapons.

In the miscellaneous town of Arumsaas, it was as if the city itself was a sort of maze.

But there was the fact I was living here, so I was able to visit the places I conducted business at without getting lost.

I have to be thankful for Clara, who drew maps, and Miranda, who led me around the streets.

And as I was walking, I found the signboard hung over a slightly narrower road.

It was the smithery I utilized in Arumsaas, and not just in weapons, they also dabbled their hands in armors. As it was easy to obtain metal here, there was an abundance of metal workers in this city.

But when it came to those aimed at adventurers, there were few to find on the main roads.

While it wasn't rare in the city of Arumsaas, the shopkeeper was a dwarf.

With a scraggly beard, and a characteristic reddened nose.

As I greeted him, he directed a smile at me.

"How is it? The order I placed?"

"It's long finished. But are you sure that's alright? I definitely made them sturdy, but… for a sabre, they're on the heavy side."

As I was alright if it was heavy, the sabre I specially ordered had an increase in thickness. The current me could wield a heavier one more or less fine.

Of all else, the mass produced ones would always snap soon enough.

There was an abundance of monsters armed with iron, so good qualities sabres weren't an easy buy in Arumsaas. Even if they were available, they were mostly too expensive to consider purchasing.

I accepted the five sabres, and looked over the other goods.

Arrows equipped with magic stones on their ends to combust.

A product made to raise the pocket change of the town's students.

However, we couldn't get together the numbers this time, so I asked one of the blacksmith's acquaintances to have them manufactured.

"… The numbers are more than enough."

"We'll properly do the work we've been asked of. If the customers drift away, then with this shop location, my store will close before you know it. Even so…"

The shopkeeper looked over the arrows I purchased.

"What's wrong?"

"No, it's not like there's a large-scale party labyrinth raid, or a war happening here anytime soon. Despite that, our stock of these sorts of weapons is running low."

The arrows rigged to trigger explosions fetched quite a price.

Even if purchasing one or two wasn't a problem, to get sufficient numbers, they cost several times the amount of normal arrows.

What's more, if they were of bad quality, they wouldn't explode, the output would be lower, or other defects might occur.

It was hard to control that.

They weren't fit for long-term storage, so it was normal to decide the required amount, and have an order sent in for them to be made.

They could also explode if you were to be attacked, so managing

them was a pain.

If a party didn't have a baggage carrier, they would be too scared to use them. But they were reliable in the labyrinth… that sort of weapon.

"Someone must have bought them in mass. Because of that, I wasn't able to buy any at the place I patronized before."

I said that with a wry smile, and the shopkeeper cautioned me to handle them with care as he handed them over.

He addressed me.

"Come to think of it, what happened to that side ponytail girl that came with you before?"

He asked about Novem, so I told him she wasn't with me this time.

He seemed a little sad.

While a dwarf's and a human's aesthetic senses differed, it seems he had taken a liking to her.

"If she was here, I'd have offered a discount. How unfortunate."

"Yes, how unfortunate. I'll be sure to bring her along next time."

As I said that, the shopkeeper broke out into a smile.

"Even mother took a liking to that girl. Have her drop by sometime."

I took the merchandise, paid a large sum, and exited the blacksmithery.

❼

… Aria was performing a check on her own equipment before challenging the labyrinth.

The ones checking the contents of the stock loaded onto Porter were Lyle and Poyopoyo.

Everyone else was confirming their own belongings.

In the Circry House's mansion's yard, everyone had woken up early, and eaten breakfast.

The sky was still dim, but Clara deployed a light as she looked over her own supplies.

Everyone else also used that light to do the same.

(She's quite considerate, that girl.)

Aria looked at Clara, and thought something like that.

She confirmed her provisions, and inspected her equipment. Her spare weapons were loaded onto Porter, so she made sure to take a look at those ones first.

"Okay, that's the last of it!"

In plans this large in scale… when they would be staying over a few days in the labyrinth, it would really be a problem if they didn't get their supplies in order.

Forgetting a single piece of baggage, and leaving regrets as they die.

For that sake, it was important to perform various checks, starting the previous day.

While recalling Lyra's teachings, she got her things together as she looked around.

Miranda had been an adventurer for even less time than herself, but she was calmly going through herbelongings.

"Hey, you forgot your canteen!"

"Eh? But there's water loaded onto Porter, and… Hiii! I'm sorry!"

"Go get it at once. Make sure you check its contents too."

Miranda was even doing Shannon's checks for her.

They had locked up the mansion, so Shannon borrowed the key

before running off.

Clara looked over a memo as she went over her items one by one.

With her finger pointed, she through them carefully, before checking them off.

“Okay, I’m done here as well… the second check also checks out.”

It seems she had already gone over it twice. She started checking her things once more, as she stuffed them into bags.

(I’d never be able to imitate that one.)

She didn’t look that methodical, but perhaps due to her pro mentality as a support, she made sure to properly check her things.

And Aria turned her eyes to Novem.

Perhaps already finished, she was heading to Lyle to load her luggage onto Porter.

Her feet stopped, and she suddenly turned towards the wall.

Aria also tried looking in that direction, but as the lighting was dim, she could only fear Novem was seeing a sort of ghost.

(She doesn’t have an extra sense or anything, right… but it’s Novem, after all.)

To Aria, Novem was an opponent without anything to grasp at.

She knew Miranda was wary of her. For some reason, a tense atmosphere would often build up between the two of them.

But as Aria looked over the wall, she suddenly felt a presence.

(Eh? Something is… ah.)

On top of it was a small bird.

After looking at Novem, it flew away.

(I wonder if Novem is nervous.)

Not paying mind to it anymore, Novem continued pulling her luggage over to Lyle.

Running from the mansion, Shanon came over to Miranda key in hand.

“You made sure to fill it with water, right?”

“Of course.”

Miranda snatched Shannon’s flask, opened the lid, and took a single swig at its contents.

“… This definitely isn’t water, right?”

“T-tehe!”

She tried making a cute gesture of hitting herself with her small hand, but with a smile, Miranda’s fist came down on her head.

“If you want to bring this along so bad, then bring another flask of water too. You’ll be carrying your belongings on your own.”

On Miranda’s words, Shannon pointed at Porter.

“Can’t we just stuff it onto Porter!?”

“We have plenty of things to load onto him! Anyways, go get water again!”

While watching over the sibling fight, Aria thought.

(Somehow, Porter’s already being treated as a comrade…)

She was just slightly unsatisfied with that.

And she looked over at Lyle.

“We have a little extra space.”

Looking at the luggage loaded onto Porter, he was making a fully satisfied expression.

Lyle was delighted enough about toe completed porter to brag about it, but to Aria, he looked like a child bragging over a toy.

“We’ll be loading the collected magic stones and materials onto it, so isn’t this fine? I wanted to make it bigger, and let it be able to serve as a lodging. Having this frail chicken dickwad camping out just seems too pitiful…”

Having been called frail, Lyle shot back.

“Oy, who’s fragile? We’re inside the labyrinth, so it’s not like we’re exposed to the elements or anything. There’s no rain or wind.”

… Aria.

(As I thought, there something a little off about Lyle somewhere… and wait, within this party, there isn’t a decent person besides me…)

Aria had become much sturdier, and she was definitely becoming decent as an adventurer.

But how about as a woman? She was much more of a man than ever before.

(Hah, I’ve got to keep it together.)

She thought something like that…

❼

Having entered Arumsaas’ labyrinth, we had gotten together the members and equipment, so I was finally able to take on the challenge presented by the ancestors.

I spent a few months on completing Porter, and I get the feeling I also earned an allowance.

I think I’m growing a little as well.

Aria and Miranda-san were stationed at the front, and I was directly behind them.

The center held Novem and Clara, and Porter followed up in the rear.

As Porter proceeded along the passages that were relatively wide, Shannon sat atop its roof.

Next to Porter, Poyopoyo was attempting to pull her off. She looked at Shannon, and warned her to dismount the ceiling, and sit on the loading cart if she had to.

Clara spoke to me.

“We’ve been diving in a lot as of late, so we should be able to make it to the fifth lower level quite quickly.”

I challenged the place numerous times, carrying belongings and personnel back and forth.

That being the case, I remembered the paths to the fifth floor.

Even if the labyrinth shifted, and the passages changed, they shouldn’t differ too much from the last time I was here.

“Well, I have been challenging this place a lot.”

As I told Clara that, Novem looked at me.

“Lyle-sama, please don’t push yourself too much.”

She appeared to be worried.

“I’m not pushing myself at all. I’m just having Porter transport luggage and people. 『Lyle, the Burden』’s Porter has become quite popular among adventurers.”

The reason I said that with a little pride behind it was so as to soften this tense atmosphere.

Novem cautioned me.

“That’s no good, Lyle-sama. The leader can’t grow lax here.”

“Exactly.”

Clara agreed, and Shannon, who had been looking down on us from Porter’s roof started to smile.

“No good leader.”

She pointed and gave an annoying smile, so in response, I…

“Hey, they’re coming! Two ahead. They’re goblins.”

Aria raised her voice, I drew a sabre, and issued orders.

“Aria and Miranda-san, take care of them. Everyone else, remain vigilant.”

Miranda-san and Aria easily dealt with the monsters rushing at us. This shallow into the labyrinth… anywhere before the fifth floor, we could proceed onwards just be rotating the frontlines.

The two members of the female army were generally lightly armed, but the goblins were defeated immediately.

Aria impaled the first one, while Miranda used one dagger to slash at the other one’s eyes and dull its movements, before stabbing her second dagger into a vital…

(What, with that… it was over in an instant.)

I thought it would take a little more time, but the two’s movements had become much sharper than before.

Aria stood to keep watch of the surroundings, and Clara started moving.

As we would be going in quite deep, we would only be collecting magic stones here. If we had a large amount of materials flow into our hands here, we would be fully loaded before arriving at the thirtieth floor.

I was assisting with the stone collection when I heard the Second from the Jewel.

『It sure is a wonder.』

The Third spoke as well.

『What is?』

The Second went on.

『Humans, you know. Someone who wasn't standing out up to now, when you leave work to them, you see they can suddenly accomplish it?』

The Fourth agreed.

『Yeah, that happens. Up to that point, they thought it was fine if they didn't do anything. But when work's left to them, they suddenly feel no one but them can do it. That type.』

The Fifth also spoke up.

『If there are ten people, then of them, two to three of them will become no good. In exchange, of the remaining members, two to three of them will persist on.』

The Sixth addressed me.

『In that case, up until this point, Lyle's work was making the other party members no good.』

My heart hurt a little.

As plenty of instances came to mind, I couldn't say anything in response.

The Seventh followed up.

『It's because the performance of the Skills is extraordinary. It's not just Lyle's fault, is it? The fact that Aria has become more aware of herself also instigated a large change.』

He even followed through for Aria.

While she had become quite masculine, her movements had gotten much more adventurer-like.

She didn't just do what she was told, she did whatever she could even before asked.

Because of that, I didn't have to focus on orders, and I could concentrate on other tasks.

But… the Second spoke.

『But I’m starting to get a prickly sensation in another sense.』

The Fourth spoke.

『What is it? That sort of intuition the First had?』

I was curious, so I concentrated on their conversations as I assisted Clara with her work.

『No, Miranda-chan is overly wary of her surroundings, Novem-chan’s atmosphere today is a little… well, it would be nice if it was just my imagination.』

I looked over my party.

Truly, they looked much tenser than usual.

(Isn’t it just because we’re aiming for the thirtieth floor without Skills?)

But stopping here to talk wouldn’t’ get us anywhere, so I signaled for us to move onwards.

“Collection is finished. Now then, let’s get moving. We have to get as far as we can today.”

Saying that, I I started walking forward, and everyone took up the same formation as before to follow.

❼

We were on the way to our planned rest point.

There was a nice spot on the fifth floor, so we headed there, and found the inside of the room was bright.

I scratched my head.

“We’re out of luck. It’s already booked.”

A different party was taking a break there.

They may have been planning to leave shortly, but we didn’t intend to

wait for that.

Clara spoke.

“The right of priority lies with the first party to find the spot. Do you want to try negotiating? They may be preparing to depart.”

I confirmed the time that had elapsed.

(It was relatively smooth sailing up to here. I also remembered the path, so… I guess we should proceed further in, and secure an appropriate spot.)

With the Fifth and Sixth’s Skills, we had rarely ever met another adventurer party.

But these sorts of small unplanned occurrences were common in this job.

“No, let’s go on. We’ll take a longer break next chance we get. Miranda-san, swap out with me. Aria, can you still go on?”

Aria nodded.

“Naturally.”

Miranda-san mulled over it a little, but it seems she was going to abide by my directions.

“… Well, it’s the leader’s orders. I’ll fall back.”

I took up her front position, and resumed movement.

The Second spoke.

『Your lack of numbers is definitely a disadvantage. And wait, a break here…』

Regardless of whether we went on, or backtracked, there were a large number of adventurers on rest here.

Like us, there were parties resting a night to prepare for a longer journey.

(Since those sorts of adventurers are numerous, I wanted to find a

rest point here, though.)

Because there were so many adventurers securing their own safe respite, most of the monsters would already be defeated. Therefore, if we found a space in this area, we wouldn't have a high chance of being attacked.

(But sudden changes in plans are a pain.)

Thinking that, I started descending to the sixth floor.

The Second spoke.

『Somehow~ I have a bad feeling about this. A feeling someone went ahead of us.』

There are quite a few parties that complain when they find others in the same business occupying their planned rest points.

But that's just pointing fingers.

While I did want to say a thing or two, I didn't think I would actually say any of it.

However…

(I do have an ominous feeling here.)

12 - Pursuer

“Are we being followed?”

Having entered a space to rest on the sixteenth floor, we decided to bring our third day to a close.

Even like this, we were able to reach the eighth floor on our first day, but with a completely new maze stretched out before us, our pace dropped greatly.

We had planned to get through the fifteenth on the third day, so we had already completed our goal.

On the first day, our rest point was taken up by another group of adventurers.

From there, the gears started to misalign. We had gone further in then previously planned, but we didn’t have the necessary degree of rest.

Looking over our party, Poyopoyo and Shannon were clearly sensing something.

“They’re holding a set distance, and pursuing in a range where they’re sure we would not be able to detect them. I am troubled over what to do over it, but I can’t imagine it to be a coincidence.”

While thinking of how capable Poyopoyo was, I found that Shannon was capable as well.

“I’m of the same opinion as that scrap, and it seems they’re overly concentrated on our party. Even when they get into battle, they move on without collecting any materials.”

Miranda and Aria were lying down asleep.

For Aria, who went up front to scout out the area, her physical expenditure was the most severe. Clara and Novem were on watch around the entranceway, but originally, I wanted to have them rest.

However, with our low numbers, that wasn't going to happen.

Shannon spoke.

"Before we departed, they were at the mansion as well."

Hearing that, I grasped both of her shoulders.

"Why didn't you say anything about that!?"

And…

"Eh? I mean, Novem and Onee-sama both noticed it as well, so I assumed…"

Poyopoyo let out a condescending laugh.

"Oh, so *you* didn't notice it."

I couldn't say anything back to that, but having finally received the information, I thought.

(They're keeping a fixed distance? What does this mean… are they thinking of attacking us? Will they aim for when our baggage is fully loaded? I don't think they have one among them capable of moving Porter, though.)

From the Jewel, I heard the Third's voice.

『So you guys've been targeted… how troublesome.』

The Fifth spoke hypothetically.

『Lyle, if the situation becomes too dangerous, abandon the task. I'll permit Skill use as well. Or do you want to be able to use Skills from now?』

To indicate refusal, I tapped the blue Jewel with the tip of my finger.

The Seventh spoke.

『This is why I hate adventurers. Lyle, I think you get it already, but getting pincered is dangerous.』

If we were to be surrounded in these narrow passages, and the

front lines were in the middle of battle, it would be calamitous.

(I can deploy Porter as a shield out back, so should I start doing that? If they're targeting us, then…)

I looked around. Aria and Miranda were asleep, while Novem and Clara were keeping watch.

Finally, I turned to Poyopoyo and Shannon.

"What is it, damn chicken? I'd appreciate it if you didn't get it up in a place like this, dammit…"

A rustling sound reverberated as Poyopoyo tried to start taking off her clothes, so I hit her head, and started pondering whether to use Shannon's power.

(It's not my Skill, so it should be alright.)

The requirements to clearing the challenge were that I wouldn't be using Skills.

"Shannon, can you tell their numbers?"

But she shook her head.

"Nope, no idea. They're keeping themselves quite a ways away, and I'm not even all too interested. And wait, moving around in the labyrinth sure is tiring. I was lying atop Porter's load cart, so I'd like it if you made it move more quietly… ow? Ow!? Ow!!"

I grabbed the top of her head in an iron claw, and spoke once more.

"How about you take a better look this time?"

"I'll do it! I'll do it, so please let go."

I released her. She seemed to be out of breath, but she spoke to me.

"It's hard to see in the labyrinth, you know. This sort of… thickness, and all sorts of information is all around making it all muddled up. Also…"

Shannon looked at one of the corners of the room.

There, a bug was fluttering around.

Perhaps it followed us to flock to the light of Porter's lantern.

The Second screamed out.

『Lyle, crush that bug!』

I instantly threw the knife I had on hand, and the slightly large moth fell to the ground.

(What?)

As the knife collided with the wall, it drew the attention of everyone in the room.

And while she hadn't been paying it any mind before, Poyopoyo approached the moth, and spoke.

"What an ominous lifeform you've found there."

Shannon's opinion differed. Even when looking at the strange moth-like bug, she remained unsurprised.

"Really? I don't think that's even a lifeform, that one."

With the bug hater saying that, there was likely no doubt about it. When I approached it, its eerie silhouette faded away.

Shannon spoke.

"It was a peculiar mass of Mana. I mean, there was a sort of slender thread coming from it, and there's likely someone controlling it from somewhere."

When I began wondering why the hell she hadn't said anything about it before, she looked at me, and puffed up her cheeks.

"Hey, you were just thinking that I was useless, weren't you?"

"Wrong. I was wondering why you didn't bring it up earlier. So let me ask anyways, why didn't you say anything about it?"

Shannon offered an excuse.

“I just noticed it now! I didn’t see it on the first or second days or anything.”

Poyopoyo spoke.

“I’ll bet. Today is the first day it appeared.”

As I became lost in thought, Clara came over to inform us of the time for shift rotation.

“What’s wrong? You seem to be getting lively?”

Aria’s eyes were also open. She was glaring in this direction, and her hair was a mess, and she looked sleepy. I think she seemed irritated.

“How loud… let me sleep already.”

Novem remained watchful over the room’s entrance, and she wasn’t looking in our direction.

Miranda raised the top half of her body, and was stretching out her arms.

“It was about time for me to get up, so that’s perfect, but… did something happen? If an enemy was attacking, we promised to announce a raid, and wake up whoever was asleep, right?”

I offered an apology to everyone, and started explaining the situation.

❼

Rushing through the fourth day, we stopped to take a rest on the twenty first floor.

Back then, we had a discussion on whether to turn back, or proceed. However, we chose moving forward as the option to take.

I said it was fine even if we didn’t reach our goal on this voyage, but

Novem and Miranda asserted their desires to continue on.

Surprisingly, Aria sided with turning around, of all things.

That one surprised even me.

As a temporary member, Clara didn't give an opinion. However, she did give a warning that we should be careful if we chose to turn back.

On the twenty first floor, I issued my orders.

"Aria, Miranda, fall back! I'll take up the front. Novem, prepare your magic!"

Letting loose an arrow, I made an orc drop its shield from the resultant explosion, before drawing my sabre, and rushing out towards it.

Goblins ran at us along the passage through the orc's sides.

They ignored me, and tried to launch attacks on the members in the rear.

"You guys are underestimating us way too much."

By the time I reached to orc to cut at it, the goblins had already been cleaned up by Aria and Miranda-san.

Miranda-san took down three, and Aria finished off the other two.

I slashed at the orc, and severed its arm, before landing lightly. Without cutting at it again, I retreated behind it.

When I turned back to look at it, the orc burst into flames.

It was Novem's magic.

"No matter how many times I see it, I can't help but be impressed by her output."

As I muttered that, the Second spoke.

『Don't drop your guard. Concentrate on your surroundings. You've been delayed here by monsters… perhaps the distance between

you and your pursuers has shrunken a bit.』

I looked past the blazing Orc.

There were no signs that another adventurer party was close by.

I sheathed my blade, and as there was a distance to my comrades, I answered in whisper.

“Is it possible that they won’t give chase if we split up?”

The Third spoke.

『You sure are naïve, Lyle. Think about the sorts of Skills you have in your possession. Within this world, there are loads of people with Skills even more troublesome than ours, you know.』

Meaning they think it’s likely the other party has a Skill proficient in pursuit.

Fights between adventurers aren’t something simply decided by a difference in strength.

When Skills come into play, it’s as different as night and day. I tread over the orc, and looked at Porter, as it climbed over the obstacles in its way.

Even within the labyrinth, because of its legs, it could proceed forward without a problem.

“How reliable.”

And Novem approached.

“Are you alright, Lyle-sama?”

I nodded.

“Yeah, no problem. Even so, you firepower sure has gone up. I guess I’ll never beat you when it comes to magic.”

As I said that, she lightly brought her clenched fist to her mouth, and smiled.

“Then I guess there was some worth in exerting myself.”

Using magic to birth forth water, Clara began collecting materials and magic stones from the orc's carcass.

I'm beginning to worry for myself, having become completely used to the sight of a small girl dismantling an orc's body.

Novem asked me.

"Are you still curous about the people on our trail?"

"They're a troublesome lot. This is the twenty first floor, you hear? If they can even make it out here, then they've got more than enough merit as adventurers to put food on the table."

Adventurers that earned by targeting other adventurers definitely existed.

Especially in the labyrinths, where they didn't have to trouble themselves over disposing of the bodies.

As time passed, the walls would just absorb them.

The reason that trash and death aren't littered around the place is because a mechanism like that's in place.

Among the researchers, the major opinion is that by eating corpses and the like, the labyrinth grows, and becomes deeper.

"… Should we turn back?"

I shook my head.

"We'll get back on track immediately. We've already decided that, so we've got to go through with it. If it gets dangerous, we will turn around, though."

As Shannon took Miranda's side, it was decided we were pressing forward.

I wonder what she's thinking…

I won't say Poyopoyo's opinion was the same as Clara's.

She said she would just obey whatever was decided.

Is that because she's an automaton? I'd like it if she behaved so modest on a regular basis.

❼

After exceeding floor twenty one, we could only move on bit by bit.

While taking a break, I worked with Clara to draw the map to return.

By the light of Porter, we looked over the memos she had made as e expanded them on paper.

Today, Miranda-san was on watch.

Aria was asleep, and Novem was also lying down.

Shannon was dozing off close to Miranda.

"… The twenty sixth floor is something like this, I guess."

Looking at the completed map, I nodded. The Labyrinth is constantly changing. The frequency of change differs by the labyrinth, but in Arumsaas' one, these sorts of notes weren't a waste.

Even if there may be minor changes, it was generally the same when it came time to return.

"So tommorow's the twenty seventh."

"I feel we'll be able to make it to the thirtieth by the seventh day. Even so, Porter sure is amazing. It's specified to Arumsaas' labyrinth, but if you remodel, it'll be usable elsewhere as well."

I looked at Porter as I spoke.

"The Speed's a problem. If I wanted to use it outside, it would be more efficient to take a carriage. However, when it's inside the labyrinth, it's definitely convenient."

Clara nodded, as she carefully folded the drawn out map, and packed it away in the luggage.

We'll be abiding it when we plan on going back.

Depending on the situation, it may even become a lifeline.

I spoke to Clara.

“Hey, why not join our party like this? Not as a temporary member, but as an official comrade?”

I had been thinking of inviting her for a while.

The one who advised it most strongly was the Third.

『So you’re finally inviting her over, chicken dickhead Lyle!』

(He’s learning Poyopoyo’s words…)

The Third had told me to do it earlier, but the timing never meshed, and I didn’t get an opportunity to talk with her like this.

I’d already brought it up with Novem and the others, so it wasn’t my own arbitrary verdict.

But Clara covered her eyes.

“I’m thankful for the offer. But I doubt it will work out.”

“Why not?”

As I sat unable to understand her reason for refusal, Clara began talking about herself.

“In the past, I used to attend the academy.”

“Come to think of it… I get the feeling I’ve heard something like…”

I heard a voice from the Jewel.

It was the Third.

『Lyle… won’t you pipe down for a while?』

His voice was a little low, so he was likely serious. I closed my mouth.

“I think I’m the type that’s good at studying. I mean, I like books and all, and I think I have a greater abundance of knowledge than the

average person.”

I nodded. Because of that, we’ve been helped numerous times.

But…

“My Skill… its third stage, 『Walking Library』 was exactly what I was. And so, I thought it was time to stop.”

I tilted my head.

Perhaps understanding I didn’t get it, Clara politely started to explain.

“A walking library. Even if I’m ever to forget the knowledge of the books I’ve read, the Skill alone will record it for me. And if I pose a question to it, it will give an answer based on the knowledge I’ve gathered up to now.”

“No, isn’t that incredible!?”

But Clara shook her head.

“I can’t take out any information from it on my own. If someone else asks me, it will give an answer… what’s more, if the books I’ve read were to be biased…”

The Third spoke.

『I see. There’s no saying the answer will ever be correct. As an adventurer… it’s a bit questionable, but she’s still capable, I’m sure.』

I shared his sentiment.

“But that’s still an amazing Skill, isn’t it?”

She took off her glasses, and started wiping them on a cloth.

“… There are people with much better Skills at the library. To never forget a book you’ve once read. To put together all the information on hand, and use it to arrive at a conclusion. If you look at those people, I’m but a degraded version.”

“No, that’s a little much…”

Clara shook her head again.

“It’s fine. I was always good at absorbing knowledge, but I was terrible at putting it to use. I sure am awkward, aren’t I? And so, I’m just doing whatever I’m capable of to earn money. There are people who can carry out their work just because they’re diligent at it, you know?”

As she directed a smile at me, I saw a little sadness in her.

The Third spoke to me.

『Why are you so quiet!? Start inviting her over with passion! If it were the『Mr. Lyle』of your Growths, he would have definitely used this scene to get her to fall for you!』

The Sixth spoke.

『This is where you should firmly stand your ground.』

It would be troublesome if I gave up.

As I thought that, Novem swayed as she rose, and started approaching Clara. I was unable to see her expression with the dim light of the lantern, and it was just a little scary.

She clenched Clara’s hand.

Novem was smiling.

“Wonderful, Clara-san.”

“Eh? Um…”

Clara was also perplexed.

She looked to me with eyes pleading for help, so I smiled, and shook my head.

Stopping Novem when her eyes were sparkling like that was something I wasn’t capable of.

“Up to now, I’ve misread you. The fact that you can use your Skill to its final level at your age, on top of your achievements… while they

may be plain, it's wonderful all the same. It's perfectly fine if you took a little more pride in it."

"W-well thanks for that… could you let go of my hand now…"

"And so!"

"Y-yes!?"

Novem called out to her in a loud voice.

"I'd definitely like to add you to Lyle-sama's harem member list. From the look of things, he has taken a liking to you. I'm sure there won't be a problem."

The Third voiced agreement.

『There's a large problem in the individual herself's opinion being ignored, but if she's being included in, then all's well with the world. At this point, there won't be a problem if you get another girl or two, right, Lyle?』

Clara sent me a troubled glance, but I was just as troubled.

(What? She's not even trying to mask that she's adding people to my harem for her own desires anymore, this girl? Ain't happening…)

I spoke to Novem.

"Novem, that sort of coercion is no good, and to me, you are…"

"Lyle-sama!"

Novem looked at me. Her eyes were full of power, and chills ran down my spine.

"Y-yes!?"

"When she's putting out so many signs for you, there's a limit to being dense. There's no way that Clara-san hates, you, Lyle-sama. No, more so…"

"No… please don't say any more…"

Seeing Clara cling onto Novem with teary eyes, some complex

feelings began to surface within me.

(Eeeeeh? The girl who refuses to understand my own feelings is going to say that? But she's cute, so I'll forgive it… No, wrong!)

"No, you see, Novem. I don't think this sort of thing is acceptable. I can't manage something like a harem. See, I'm still just a skilled novice at adventuring."

While I said that, Novem begain shaking her head.

"No. Lyle-sama, you will eventually attain greatness. To prepare for that time, this girl's power will definitely be essential. Also, after going this far together…"

After saying that much, Clara put on her glasses, and frantically tried to shut Novem up.

"Wait… wrong… you're not wrong, but wait anyways."

And with a smile, Novem spoke.

"Now then, about becoming our comrade…"

"I get it. So please, anymore is…"

To the clinging Clara, Novem directed a smile full of delight.

"You've done it, Lyle-sama. With this, Clara-san has become our comrade."

As I was spacing out, Poyopoyo began clapping.

"Congratulations, you damn chicken. I never thought you would do something as underhanded as using other women to make the one in your heart your own… I, Poyopoyo am always prepared to turn to evil for your sake."

I yelled out.

"Ain't happening! You were watching that exchange, right!? Scrap metal, you're doing this on purpose, right!?"

Next to a sleepy Shannon, there was a clapping Miranda-san.

“You’ve succeeded in building up quite a nice atmosphere within the labyrinth… as expected of Lyle.”

“Hey… I’m sleepy… please don’t wake me up for such trivial matters.”

I looked towards Aria.

She was clapping with an expressionless face.

“Yes, as expected of Lyle. Making your targeted women your own one after another… you’re the worst.”

After saying that, she pulled the covers over herself, and went to sleep.

“Oy! You’re wrong! This is that! You know, that!”

Ignoring me as I tried to give an excuse, everyone returned to their past positions.

Clara sat down on the spot, and hid her reddened face with both hands.

The Fourth spoke.

『Lyle-kun, you’re the worst.』

The Second…

『It’s that. I think you should just give up already.』

The Sixth spoke.

『Ye~ah, that conversation was one thing but… how about nabbing Miranda with this momentum. Tack Shannon onto that while you’re at it.』

The Seventh…

『Good for you. And wait, that’s all I can say at this point.』

The Fifth spoke.

『It may have been nice for Lyle and the third, but make sure to

follow up with Aria afterwards.』

The Third was in high spirits.

『A walking library is amazing. If I had met her before I met my wife, I'd definitely have called out! Lyle, make sure you treasure her.』

I thought.

(No, I did call out to her… but I definitely did not ask for this!)

Along with a flushed Clara, I spent an awkward time in silence.

13 - Targeted Comrades

The twenty ninth floor..

Miranda confirmed the dagger and knife hanging at her waist.

As she had chosen clothing easier to move in than before, her body's lines were coming out.

Even if she were to be called her lightly equipped, while there were metal protectors around her knees and whatnot, with the design focusing on ease of movement, it couldn't be said she had any actual armor.

Even so…

"Yep, and we're done here."

She tossed the dagger in her right hand at the ogre with iron wrapped around its body, and it stabbed into its eyes.

In the direction it had lost sight of, was Aria.

Having come all the way to floor twenty nine, even Aria started using her Skills.

Several times her own physical strength, weapon enhancement… with those stacked onto one another, a heavy blow came down on the ogre's head.

The shortspear impaled its skull, and after it collapsed, she withdrew the spear, and took distance from the other surrounding monsters.

The orc that tried approaching her had its head blown off.

It was Lyle.

Stanced with a bow, he used one of his limited exploding arrows to whittle down the enemies' numbers.

Miranda also tossed her knives at the monsters that tried

approaching her.

An orc, that had lost both of its eyes to her knives tried to blindly swing its weapon, but she tossed a dagger at its throat.

Blood poured out of the pierced jugular, and the orc writhed around in pain, messing up the movements of its allies around it.

And in that time, another explosion wrung out, and the struggling orc was the only one that remained.

Using up all its strength, it finally collapsed onto the floor,

And Aria dealt the finishing blow.

Lyle issued out orders.

“Keep watch of the perimeter. We’ll be taking a short breather here. Clara, I’ll leaving it to you. Novem, how are you feeling?”

The magician, and the party’s main firepower Novem had been making frequent use of magic on the twenty ninth.

Lyle wanted to preserve it in preparation for the next day, so he didn’t include her in the preceding battle.

“I’m fine. Would it not be better if I fought as well?”

Miranda thought to herself.

(I’ll bet. Lyle’s decision isn’t wrong, but he’s underestimating her.)

After thinking a while, Lyle spoke.

“… We’ve already found the entrance to the thirtieth floor. I’ll have you prepare for tomorrow. While I can also use magic, I’ll generally be leaving it to you, Novem. Thinking of what’s to come, as you’re also taking the role of our healer, I’d like you to preserve Mana.”

Miranda turned to the rear of her vigilant party.

(If we weren’t being trailed, Novem would’ve participated, and the battle would have ended easily.)

There was a party on their trail, and it was a few days prior that her

sister Shannon started being wary of them.

Having come this far on the seventh day after entering the labyrinth, their party was moving at quite a high pace.

Last time, they had defeated the fortieth floor boss, and returned within a week.

Considering that, it may seem slow, but their pace was more than high enough.

The knives and daggers on hand.

Clara recovered them along with the materials, and handed them to Miranda.

“Miranda-san.”

“Thanks, Clara…”

Miranda had made sure to direct a smile when Lyle had invited the girl over, but her true thought on the matter were a little conflicted.

Despite having seen the ugly sides of her, he had accepted her as she was. But to what extent was that…

No one understood that. Not even herself.

(Comrades, is it?)

It would be a lie to say she didn’t have anything to say about Clara.

Miranda hadn’t been invited by Lyle yet. She was just offering her help at this point.

While they were officially registered in the same party, she couldn’t help but wonder.

Just how does Lyle think of me?

They were words close to a confession. Novem also perceived her as a member of the harem. And strangely enough…

Right now, she wanted to stay by Lyle’s side.

(I mean, we're already in a situation as if we've been driven out of the Circry house, so it's fine to tag along to the end, isn't it?)

The personality brought forth by Shannon, and the face she had never put on the surface.

The two of them mixed, and the current Miranda no longer merely an existence with a disposition to be nice to any and everyone.

Her eyes drifted slightly towards Lyle as she talked with Clara.

She accompanied her to Porter's side, confirmed her own equipment, and wiped off the blood.

"Ah, I guess it would be better to replace these."

Finding a knife that would be better off switched out, she called out to Shannon within Porter.

"Shannon, can you pass over my spare knives?"

As there were no signs of enemies around, she raised her voice, and a metal door opened, from which Shannon emerged, and dismounted.

Perhaps she was sleeping, as her hair was in disarray.

"You.. you were sleeping in the middle of battle?"

Miranda seemed mildly fed up, but Shannon spoke.

"I mean, you guys aren't going to lose against those measly numbers, right? Also, I didn't have anything to do, so I was bored. I should have brought something along to kill time."

The sister who she thought couldn't see… the frail and docile girl seemed to be able to adapt to the oppressing air of the labyrinth better than anyone.

(Could it be the power in her eyes?)

Taking the knives, she handed Shannon the ones that had become unusable.

“… Even when we still have the return trip, we’ve ruined more than half of our equipment. Will we be fine like this? Food supplies are also…”

Shannon said that looking at Porter, and Miranda replied.

“It’s fine. The return is easier than the journey… no, that’s wrong. It’s because we know the path that the return trip is quicker. But we’d usually be loading up with magic stones and materials, making the load troublesome, it seems…”

Miranda looked at Shannon and Porter.

The comrade that Lyle and Poyopoyo had manufactured was truly a reliable existence.

“… Well, we’ll be fighting the boss tomorrow, so we’ll be going back as soon as we’re done with that. We know the road to take, so it’ll likely be faster.”

They confirmed the entrance to the thirtieth floor.

Calling a close early for the day, they were resting in preparation for tomorrow.

Miranda told Shannon to return to Porter, as she stowed away her replaced knives.

(It would be nice if nothing were to happen, but that’s impossible.)

Looking behind, Miranda sensed an ominous presence…

❼

The exit of the twenty ninth floor… meaning the area before the boss’s room on the thirtieth. There, we found a small room, and took a break.

I stationed Porter at the room’s entrance, so entering or exiting wasn’t possible.

“I should’ve just done that from the start.”

I complained, but Clara was opposed to my opinion.

“Blocking off rooms in the labyrinth isn’t recommended. Here in Arumsaas, the place is managed by the guild. With that being the case, turf disputes among adventurers is hated.”

WE could lose our rights to challenge the labyrinth, so doing something like this in an area with a greater number of parties was out of the question.

“So it’s like a rule in Arumsaas?”

“It’s a local rule. It may be different elsewhere.”

Clara informed me of how standard adventuring rules could vary by the province.

While I was talking with Clara, as she lit up the room with her staff from the corner, we were actually keeping watch.

I heard a voice from the Jewel.

It was the Sixth.

『Lyle… how about turning around just a little bit? If you don’t take in any sensory information, we can’t see either.』

(… Dammit. Try considering why Clara’s on watch in the first place.)

At present, behind me, the female army…

Everyone apart from me was wiping down their bodies with towels.

A bucket had been filled with water Clara produced with magic. Using that, they were wiping off the sweat, and monster blood.

I spoke.

“Hey, is the water created through magic drinkable?”

Clara shook her head.

“Researchers have carried out experiments on it time and again. Generally, you’ll ruin your stomach if you ingest it. There are some people who won’t break, but… I cannot recommend it. Also, how

should I put it, it's a bit questionable…"

I listened to her words, and spoke.

"So you tried it?"

"Yes, with the mindset that I could put enough food on the table if I became a support who could prepare drinkable water… 'Twas a failure."

What a challenger.

The Second spoke.

『It's not good to rely on magic for everything.』

The Third was of the same opinion.

『Right. It's always the same. 『The Magician's Village』, I think it was.』

Hearing that, the Fourth tried to remember something.

『That's a fairy tale directed at children, right? It was quite an essential one.』

『the Magician's Village』… I've also read it.

But I think Clara's case is a little different.

"It's that. It's best not to overstep your bounds."

"Yes, I swore never to try it again."

I conversed some more with Clara, as she hung her head, before a refreshed Aria called out to us.

"We're done over here."

As I turned around, the Sixth let out a bit of a regretful voice.

『She just doesn't get it. A little more embarrassment would be appreciated here.』

The Seventh also looked at Aria, and spoke.

『This girl is, bit by bit…』

The girl attaining bad rep among those two was equipped waist down, but her top half was wearing a shirt without any undergarments underneath.

What's more, she was carrying herself boldly.

"Something wrong?"

I spoke.

"I think you should be a bit more bashful."

But she responded swiftly.

"And why do I have to mind that in a place like this?"

She was right.

Clara also addressed me.

"Lyle-san, you dreaming too much. This is how female adventurers generally are. They're just comrades who sleep alongside male adventurers as well… but I think this party is on the better side of things. Among them, there are women who wear nothing but underwear, or prance around naked. Ah, that's only after securing a safe spot in the labyrinth, mind you."

The Fourth spoke.

『The hell… no wonder adventurers avoid those in the same business.』

The Second spoke.

『It's because men are beings that live through dreams. But I guess there's no helping it, given the environment.』

While that was going on, Miranda-san wandered over.

"What are you doing?"

She had a towel wrapped around her neck, but she was properly wearing clothing underneath. The reason for her rough attire was

likely because Porter was blocking the entranceway.

Her hair still seemed to be a little damp.

With her disposition to tickle and tempt the male heart, I was unable to lift my eyes from her.

The Fourth spoke.

『This is it…』

The Fifth too.

『She sure does resemble Milleia…』

The Sixth…

『This girl sure does get it.』

The Seventh was…

『Hmm, completely different from that Aria.』

I felt my own face getting mildly flushed.

Clara and Aria stared at me reproachfully. But all I could think for now was…

(Why am I listening to these sorts of conversations from the ancestors… no, it's just I'll hear them regardless, and I can't turn it off.)

❼

The next day.

Having gotten our preparations together, we descended the stairwell to the thirtieth floor.

Novem asked.

"It's fine to have Shannon-chan on Porter, but I think it will be difficult to station them at the room's entrance."

The passage that led to the boss room was quite wide, and it was impossible to block it up with Porter alone.

Shannon was wary of those pursuing us from behind, but that doesn't give much peace of mind.

"It will be most dangerous when we're in the middle of fighting the boss."

After I said that, Poyopoyo stepped foreard.

"Well then, I, Poyopoyo will protect the rear lines!"

I was mulling over whether to dispatch her in the boss battle. She was too strong for me to get a sense of achievement.

And before those feelings and all, we needed to know whether we had the ability to take on the boss ourselves. For that sake, Poyopoyo had been put on support to now.

"… Stay close to Porter, and protect Shannon. I doubt it'll happen, but if we are to lose, then take the surviving members along with Shannon, and escape."

She shrugged her shoulders, and looked at me with some cynicism.

"What is it?"

"No, if my chicken dickwad is to perish, then that strange energy source you call Mana will be cut, and I will cease function. I'll likely be able to move for a while, but personally, I would be using that time to beat the living daylights out of whoever killed my master, and make them regret the day they were born into this world."

As she said that overflowing with confidence, Novem gave a wry smile.

"Um, wouldn't it just be better to lend a hand if it gets dangerous?"

"I-I'm being hypothetical here. I-it's not like I want to see my chicken dickwad die either, you know!"

The Third spoke.

『I’m starting to lose track of whether automatons are supposed to be amazing, or not.』

The Fifth.

『』To have such glaring flaws in a machine this elaborate, I’m not sure whether to praise or speak ill of them… how troubling.

And as a conversation like that carried out, we arrived at the boss room.

I issued orders to everyone.

“You’ve all made sure to check your equipment, right?”

I made sure everyone nodded, before confirming the plan.

“The front lines will have Aria and Miranda-san moving around to attract its attention. I’ll take the center, and support you two with magic. I’ll leave the finishing blow to Novem, and Clara, please operate Porter, and keep the room alit. Shannon is on standby within Porter, and Poyopoyo will be guarding them.”

After finishing the checks, I went on to the measures against the pursuer that had a high likelihood of intervening during the battle.

“… There’s a possibility we’ll be assaulted by a third party during the battle. Right after the fight as well. If it happens during the battle, take up a formation as to focus boss together. In that case, I’ll be the one taking on our stalkers.”

After the battle, we would remain wary of the entrance, and station Porter to make a wall, in case any attacks were to come.

On my judgement, the Second seemed unsatisfied.

『Well, if you think that’s fine, then have at it.』

The Third spoke.

『It’s Lyle’s decision, so let’s leave it at that. Personally, I do see a problem, though.』

There’s no guarantee… that retreat would mean safety.

We have much too little information on the enemy.

The reason I put the boss as the priority was so I could use my ancestors' Skills after that.

(We have to swiftly take the boss out, and prepare for our pursuers. That's how we'll break through the present situation.)

Based on Shannon's testimony, they were still on our trail.

… I declared to everyone.

"Let's go!"

We rushed forward, and Aria and Miranda-san ran in front of me.

I could hear the footsteps of the members behind me, and the turning of Porter's wheels.

Within the room, was the figure of a large ogre holding a cylinder.

"I didn't pay it much mind before, but… it's much bigger than a normal ogre."

It had a large amount of exposed skin, but around the head and neck, and the abdomen was, not a jumble of parts like the other monsters, but what seemed to be an armor specially fitted to it.

The thick rod in its hand was hollow, and seeing it, Poyopoyo spoke.

"So it has a cannon, does it? … Equip it on porter for an instant power up."

On the other end of the pipe, it had a squarish bludgeon-like weapon stuck on. It probably had it precisely because it's an ogre, but I'd like to refrain from getting hit by that one.

I drew a sabre, and prepared magic in my left hand.

In that time, Aria and Miranda-san positioned themselves to attack from two sides, and garnered the ogre's attention.

I chanted magic.

"Fire Bullet!"

Numerous orbs of fire came down on its head, temporary sealing off its eyesight.

There, Aria used a Skill to cut at it.

Miranda-san tossed her daggers at the area around its knee joints.

I couldn't see its face through its helmet, but it raised a war cry, so it had likely flown into a rage. I looked behind.

(Novem hasn't finished her preparations yet.)

I watched the boss, praying an enemy attack wouldn't come, as I continued scattering small spells at it, making it focus a moderate amount of attention on my position.

And starting to swing around its cudgel, it chucked it at Clara, who was lighting the room.

"Clara, fall back!"

The thrown weapon made an unpleasant metallic sound as it was shot down to the ground.

The one who did it was Poyopoyo.

"Securing the backline's safety is I, Poyopoyo's, job… with a worthless master behind me, I'm currently reflecting on my life."

I gave my thanks in answer to her sarcasm.

"Nicely done. I'll tell you the name I thought up when we're done here. Keep looking out for the back lines like that!?"

"What did you say!? Why did you have to say that now, and not during yesterday's rest…"

She started to mumble about 'Flags' or something of the sort, but I ignored her, and looked towards the boss. Having lost its weapon, it was hitting down on Aria and Miranda-san with its bare hands.

"Lightning!"

When the two of them took up some distance from it, I used magic

to rack on some damage.

It was far from a fatal blow, but I definitely dulled its movements somewhat.

(As I thought, the First's Skill sure was useful.)

Before the enemy we're currently struggling with, thinking of how I beat it with a single blow before reinformed me of how valuable the Skills were.

And as we surrounded the boss, laying on attacks, Clara shouted out.

"The preparations are finished!"

On the loud shout of the usually-quiet girl, we all retreated. After I had made it all the way to the room's wall, the temperature suddenly started to climb.

"Fire Storm!"

Flames started to gather and swirl, and they condensed on their target, bringing forth a pillar of flame. Seeing that, I checked to see if that had clenched our victory.

While the boss continued to struggle and thrash about, it was unable to escape. After running out of power, it finally collapsed.

"Okay!"

The second I said that, the Second cried out.

『Lyle!』

Hearing that, I turned to the entrance.

The ones entering the room were adventurers. It was plainly obvious that we were conducting battle in this room.

On top of their clear breach of manners, the weapons in their hands were bows.

"Everyone, behind Porter!"

Aria and Miranda-san sprang to action.

As Novem had just used magic, she borrowed Clara's help to head to Porter.

But their movements were dull, so arrows came flying at the two of them.

I could see a glowing light at its tip.

Within the room lit by the burning carcass of the boss, what I saw was definitely the exploding arrows I used as well.

"…!"

The second they started running for it, the fired arrows came down on them. Based on the angle, they wouldn't be able to get behind Porter in time.

And the one who stepped out front was…

"I won't let you do that!"

Several arrows hit her head on, and explosions rung out.

It happened in an instant.

Poyopoyo still maintained her form, and stood where she was.

And there, a well-kept adventurer made his grand entrance.

I shouted out.

"You guys, what is your intent!?"

A grin floated on the face of the adventurer's delicate features.

(With that appearance… a Noble? … the receptionist said one was trying to pull Novem and the others away… is that it!?)

In the past, I had heard talks of a noble adventurer trying to recruit Novem and the rest of the party away.

A few arrows came flying my way, so I avoided them.

They exploded as they hit the walls, but along with them, smoke started coming forth.

The Fifth spoke.

『Lyle, whatever it takes, cover your mouth!』

A kind of poison.

As I thought that, the adventurer turned to me, and spoke. His eyes went towards my comrades gathered behind porter.

(This guy's aiming for Novem and the others, and…)

"Lyle, the Burden… I'll be taking your Porter."

For a moment, I was unable to comprehend what he was talking about.

14 - Automaton

“Lyle, the Burden… I’ll be taking your Porter.”

The well-kept adventurer said that, before issuing orders to his comrades.

“Prepare yourselves. The moment out of battle where they’re out of breath is our chance. Aim for the automaton first.”

Smoke continued to pour out, and my body wouldn’t move as I wanted it.

(Something mixed in with the explosions…)

The Second spoke.

『Hurry and vent the room!』

I dropped one of my sabres, and started activating magic, but the arrows aimed at Poyopoyo continued to bring forth new smoke.

The well-kept adventurer looked at the beat up Poyopoyo.

Her clothing was torn, and some parts of her skin were showing. A blood-like liquid flowed from places where her metal insides were visible.

“Poyopoyo… you bastards!”

While I was thrown into a rage, the Fifth spoke.

『Calm down. Use magic to vent the place as soon as possible. And start negotiations. Buy some time as you look for openings… it does seem like they’ll oblige if it’s negotiations.』

Hearing the Fifth’s opinion, I saw the man was definitely looking at me.

While continuing to sustain damage, Poyopoyo was stopping their attacks.

“Automaton… the fruit of an ancient civilization brought forth and revived by one of the city of scholar’s seven great. Selling it would net quite a bit, but if that proves impossible, destroy it. It’ll still fetch a pretty penny, even when broken.”

I clenched my teeth, and felt the numbness encroaching my body weakening ever so slightly.

The Third issued out some orders.

『If you leave it to your emotions here, it’ll just result in more death. Look at Porter.』

I shifted my eyes, to see Clara giving a hand signal to say they were alright.

Aria was trying to rush out, but Miranda-san held her back.

The Sixth spoke.

『Porter… no, they aren’t focusing on any of your other party members at the moment, but they do have arrows ready for them. Move with caution.』

The Seventh spoke.

『Lyle, you’ve cleared the task. Use your Skills. Pretend to toss away all your armaments to enter negotiations.』

With attacks continuing to rain down on her, Poyopoyo was using her arms to protect herself, and she couldn’t move.

I tossed aside my remaining weapons to attract the adventurer’s attention.

“… Halt fire.”

On his order, the attacks came to an end, and Poyopoyo collapsed. The other adventurers came closer, and kicked her out of the way.

“Can’t move anymore?”
“Tsk, just how much trouble do you think you’ve cost us?”
“How much can we earn for it in this broken state?”

Their conversations irritated me to no end, but I continued to glare at the well-kept adventurer.

Approaching along with those that seemed to be his escorts, he tossed over a single slip of paper.

The Third Generation spoke.

『Act as if you can barely move. Have you confirmed their numbers?』

I looked at the paper, and took it up in my shaking hands. Seeing that, he began to grin.

It was a written form to sell off the ownership of Porter. A monetary sum was also indicated.

"… What's the meaning of this?"

"It's just as you can see. I'm buying off that doll. That damn golem magic I learned from that bastard Damien… I was sure it was useless, but you've given me quite a hint. Porter… nice name, ain't it?"

His subordinates tossed a pen in my direction.

"Then you should have just brought that up from the start!"

As I said that, the Fourth spoke.

『… These guys never had any intention of putting out money to begin with. They likely aimed for this moment, to make it so they would make a mutual agreement with favorable conditions on their side.』

I hadn't thought of Porter being targeted.

I was sure it would be Novem and the others… I had gotten stuck on that notion.

"I was sure there would be more competitors, so I took the initiative. You may have thought you'd done well after having that receptionist driven out, but… the world doesn't turn so smoothly."

By the width of that grin, it was probably the guild receptionist

offering him support.

As I remembered the man I had Damien get fired, the Seventh spoke.

『Hmm, so that's the extent of his organization? How unsurprising… but it's our policy to give back what's been given to us several times over. And that man doesn't seem to realize it.』

Having lived their lives as feudal lords, all of the ancestors more or less had that part to their characters.

I looked towards the kicked Poyopoyo.

"… I was sure you'd be targeting my other comrades."

Saying that, I took the pen, and confirmed it in my mind.

(There's still a response coming from the automaton. Until we can all move, just a little longer…)

I activated my Skills.

With the Second's【All】, I got a sense of the boss's room.

With the Third's【Mind】, I passively motivated him to talk.

"Women? Are you an absolute fool? If I make enough with Porter, I can get all the women I want. Non-adventurer ones at that. Whether it be the highest ranks of courtesans, or commoners, or nobles, they'll all open their legs in front of a large enough sum. Looks like you didn't take that into account, did you now, Burden?"

The Fourth spoke.

『You're the fool here. You think I never noticed that? If you pile up achievements, and prove your worth, the possibilities expand even further, you amateur!』

I used the Fifth's Skill to fully grasp the terrain, and the Sixth's to check for enemies.

They were all fully exposing their hostility.

The Sixth spoke.

『… They all seem to have an intent to kill. Losing would be a tragedy.』

If I face defeat, then all is lost.

I once again reaffirmed the fact that that was the sort of world I lived in.

(After taking Porter, and killing me, then next is… I see.)

The entity scarier than any monster was a human. Not through books, but through true experience have I begun to grasp that fact.

They used tools, followed us with a Skill, and waited for the perfect opportunity to assault.

We were wary of them, yet still unprepared. That's why the ancestors thought of me as naïve.

In a sense, that may have been an extension of the challenge they put on me.

(But… I won't forgive you lot.)

The adventurer laughed as he watched me pretend to tremble from paralysis.

Turning my eyes to Poyopoyo, I spoke.

"You'll leave my comrades be, right?"

"Yeah, I promise they'll be treated with care."

The Third spoke.

『He never said anything about sparing them… after receiving the documents from you, it's possible he plans on wiping out your party, to say he received Porter by proper contract on the outside.』

How sickening…

Is that how I should call this feeling?

(If I were the First, then what would I do?)

Leave it to brute force. Remembering his recklessness, I smiled.

Seeing me, the adventurer clicked his tongue.

“Sorry to bother you while you’re rejoicing over there, but things’ll get bad if you don’t hurry up. The lot I hired are a tad bit short tempered, you see.”

I gave an act of signing the page. I continued to look at Porter, when the sign that the preparations were ready finally came.

The Fifth spoke.

『How naïve. How half-baked. That’s why Lyle’s been saved, though…』

The Fourth spoke.

『Lyle sure is lucky. Also, he has Poyopoyo… an automaton this time. He should’ve orked harder to keep damages to a minimum.』

The Third spoke.

『Hey, that statement’ll hurt the boy. Well, if it’s that Poyopoyo, then…』

I had a word or two I wanted to get in to these ancestors, but I withheld them, and raised my head.

And intentionally making a smile, I said…

“You guys are underestimating me way too much…”

“Hah? What are you…”

I used the Skills.

The Second’s to allow my Skill use to my allies. As I stood up, I sent my knee shooting into the face of the delicate featured man before me.

And while I was sprawling in the air, I tossed my knife and dagger at the subordinates by his side.

At the same time, Aria leapt at the adventurers gathered around Poyopoyo, and Miranda-san threw her own knives.

Novem activated her magic.

“Storm!”

Wind began to act up, and the flying arrow started spiraling off course. Smoke still circulated around the aria, but Novem and the others were covering their faces.

With the Fourth’s Speed, and the First’s to raise all my abilities, I rushed at the enemies laying concealer around the room’s entranceway.

“Box”

From the Box I summoned in midair, I took out one of the spare sabres I had stored into it quite a while ago.

Separate from the adventurers in the room, there was a separate party watching over the situation.

With a mass of magic in the form of a small bird, they were keeping tabs on the room’s events.

The Second spoke.

『The ones in the passage are the more troublesome of the two.』

Within the room, they were being suppressed by the rest of my party’s actions.

Before leaving the area, I took a last look at Poyopoyo.

(If she had only told me sooner… no, this is my responsibility. My mistake.)

And drawing another of my spares, I burst into the passage armed in both hands.

Perhapd from the Skill used for surveillance, the panicked group was already in a battle formation, awaiting my attack.

“Three magicians…”

While I muttered that, an arrow came at me before I could reach them.

Perhaps they were able to see through this darkness, as it accurately came at me.

The Second spoke up.

『Those are some nice skills, but to the current Lyle, it’s meaningless.』

Where will they come from, where will they aim?

I could understand it all, even with my eyes closed.

It’s the first I’ve made use of my Skills in a while, but as I thought, they all have extraordinary performance.

(But that’s something I could say about the enemy as well.)

But it didn’t seem that they all had vision, as when I rushed towards them, an order came at one of the magicians.

“Lights!”

“What’s wrong? Why won’t you manifest a light!?”

I cut at the magician, and kicked his head upwards. I didn’t land a killing blow, but I went on to aim for the other troublesome mages, and the archer who could aim at me in the dark.

“Oy, respond, dammit!”
“What are the enemy’s numbers!? There’s no way there’s only one!”
“Oy, oy!”

The darkness finally doing its work, once I took down the man who could see through it, the enemies fell around me one after another.

I would cut at their arms, and use kicks to take away their consciousness, before moving on to the next target.

After the amount of alarmed voices dropped, there were also some

that kept silent, and tried to conceal themselves.

I didn't let them escape, and I rendered them all unconscious. When was someone using a sKill? Was someone truly unconscious… just having that information flow into my head was a huge assistance.

(I don't have a need to land the finishing blow on any of them.)

They couldn't move, and I destroyed their weapons, or made them unusable.

The Second spoke.

『Lyle, you sure are soft.』

He called my soft as I refrained from killing my clear enemies.

But I also get the feeling he was a little happy.

And when I disarmed the final adventurer, I sheathed a single one of my sabres, and concentrated magic to my left hand to light the area.

"Hey."

"Hiii!?"

The last one was wearing a robe, and he seemed to be carrying luggage. When I looked around the area more clearly, I saw that a lot of those around were armed baggage carriers.

They didn't have many core members, and they likely focused on advancing while protecting those carrying their goods.

He said they were hired, so they were definitely adventurers skilled at their trades. I kicked a magician-esque adventurer on the ground to the side.

It was to threaten the frightened man before me.

"… You lot stalked our party, and initiated an attack. There's no way you don't know aout that, right?"

"N-no, we don't know anything. The reward was nice, so…"

I whispered.

“Mind…”

After going through a moment of chaos, the influence took effect, and he started talking fluently.

“… There were a number of beauties, so he said to have some fun before killing you all. 『The Burden』 was making a large sum, so taking that would make us rich as well, he said. Before killing, we could do whatever we wanted to the…”

“Yeah, that’s enough. What about the guild?”

“With the guild, we found the guy you had driven out a while ago, so through him, we were able to figure out your recent activity. Using some magician we picked up’s Skill, we operated surveillance, and gathered all the information on you guys as we could, but… I wonder why we couldn’t win.”

Collecting information on us, and probably receiving past info from the guild as well.

Just how did that receptionist dig up information on us anyways…

The Seventh spoke.

『Hmph! This is why you can’t trust the guild! Lyle, let’s tie this guy up, and have him bear witness.』

The Second spoke.

『You’ve sure done it, have you, Arumsaas guild… world’s apart from Dalien, or so I can’t say. Perhaps that Hawkins was just extraordinary.』

By the way our receptionist treated us while we were in Dalien, the difference in quality of guilds varied way too much.

“… Looks like Novem and the others’ finished up as well.”

I kicked the baggage carrier in the head to send his mind flying, left his luggage behind, and returned to the boss room.

… A Lyle headed for the passage out of the room, Novem used her magic to block the arrows.

Wind started building, and the smoke was making her body numb, so she directed the airflow towards the room's exit.

While covering the area around her mouth with a cloth, she watched Aria and Miranda leap out.

"Move those filthy feet of yours!!"

Aria was infuriated as she brought down the shaft of her shortspears on the adventurers playing around by kicking Poyopoyo.

Her resolve hadn't reached the level of trying to kill them.

Miranda was the same.

But her reasons were a little different.

"Rather than me, you aim for Porter the golem? Oh, my poor heart."

Her mouth was smiling, but her eyes weren't smiling at all.

The adventurer that lost one of his eyes to her thrown knife remained steadfast with his weapon ready.

"I guess you didn't come to the thirtieth floor for nothing."

But saying that, Miranda cut at both of his wrists, before planting her elbow into his skull.

Shannon was making a racket inside Porter.

"What is this!? What is the meaning of this!?"

Clara was assisting Novem, to get as much of the smoke out as possible.

An adventurer holding a bow fired off an arrow at Novem.

But the wind shifted, and without hitting her, it fell onto a completely different spot, before exploding.

"That one was aimed to kill. How unfortunate."

Saying that, Novem stopped her magic, and started off towards Poyopoyo.

The adventurer that shot the arrow was knocked off his feet by Aria, and rendered unconscious.

Having seen, that, Miranda narrowed her eyes, before proceeding to tie them all up. Or so she made it appear, but she was about to cut through the man's wrist.

Novem interjected.

"Miranda-san. I'll be healing them up later, so put them in a line."

For a moment, Miranda sent her a sharp clare.

"… Yes, I understand. More importantly, how is Poyopoyo?"

Novem crouched near the automaton, and looked over the girl that had become a shield to protect her.

All parts of her besides her head were beat up, and a red liquid was scattered around the area.

It was as if she were a real human… No, silver mechanisms replaced the parts where a human would have bone.

She was something else.

(No matter how close she was made to mimic mankind, her insides are…)

While she had a few things on her mind, Novem called out.

"Why did you cover me? Why did you get so beaten up?"

Hearing that, Poyopoyo moved nothing but her eyes to look at Novem.

"Don't look down on me… I'm a first race special model, and that chicken dickwad's… my master Lyle-sama's automaton. There's no way I could go against an order."

Novem spoke.

“If it were for your master’s sake, couldn’t you go against him?”

“… You sure are an ill-natured vixen. If I did that… that god damn chicken would be saddened, wouldn’t he? If anything, I don’t want to see the form of him crying.”

While her mouth was bad, she truly did serve for Lyle’s sake.

And Poyopoyo went on.

“… Do you have anything for me to cover myself? I’m fine with showing off my bare skin to him, but I can’t go around displaying this sorry state.”

Aria headed off to Porter, and returned with a blanket.

Dismounting from Porter, Shannon had a pale expression as she looked at POyopoyo.

“Why… why can you do something like that… you, as I thought…”

As Shannon was shocked, Miranda spoke to her.

“Shannon! Return to Porter at once.”

Separate from Shannon, who hurriedly returned, Aria went over to Poyopoyo with the blanket, and draped it around her. And she called out.

“You, why did you do something like…”

Poyopoyo smiled at her.

“Don’t make me say it again. It’s because that chicken dickwad would be saddened. I’m, you see… I’ve finally opened my eyes, but the factory that manufactured me is gone. The company is gone. Even my country is gone. I have nothing left for me here, but Lyle-sama. In this fantasy world, I’ve finally opened my eyes to my master… I had long given up hope, you know. Even if I call myself a special model… huh? I can’t really remember. But anyways, I’ve finally successfully obtained a master. I No matter how much a useless bastard he was, I was going to follow him. I mean, that’s an automaton’s sole desire.”

Hearing that, Novem cast her eyes to the ground.

Poyopoyo's eyes let off a flickering light, and Aria spoke.

"Wait, don't go silent there!"

Poyopoyo smiled.

"Please wait a while. Until Lyle-sama arrives… I have to hold myself together… no matter what."

And there, Lyle rushed into the room.

He discarded the adventurer he dragged along around the entrance, and ran towards Poyopoyo…

❼

Having run up to Poyopoyo, I put my hand to her face.

"I've been waiting for you, master… there was something I needed to ask."

With only her head intact, her neck down was covered with a blanket. A red liquid covered thr ground around her.

Like real blood.

"Why did you push yourself to…!"

The Second stopped me.

『Ah~, hey… at a time like this, you've got to hear her out.』

The ancestors also had something they wanted to say. I'd like it if they had mentioned it before we had incurred casualties.

I knew I was inexperienced, but even so…

"… Something you needed to ask? Ask whatever you want. Get straight to it."

She opened her mouth into a smile.

From the corners of her mouth, the red liquid flowed.

“My name. In truth, I had taken a liking to Poyopoyo. But since we’re here, I’d like to take on the name you’ve gone to lengths to think up for my sake.”

Her tone had become much more polite.

I held back my own tears.

I got the feeling that I shouldn’t be crying.

Even so, drip by drip, my tears fell onto her forhead and face.

“… It’s【Monica】. The name I thought I would give you. I was thinking about it the whole time. The book I was reading back then wasn’t for Porter. I wanted to think of a name for you.”

And Monica spoke.

“Monica… is it? … a fine name. I’ll treasure it.”

“Yeah, that’s right. And so, you have to always stay by my side. I’ll never call you a piece of scrap again. You are my automaton.”

Seeing Monica’s weakening state, Aria was crying.

Miranda-san crossed her arms, and hung her head.

Clara was lighting us up with magic.

Novem was holding her hand to my back.

“I’ll brag about it. My… name is… Monica… to those three mass… and so… once more… together…”

I grasped her face in both hands, and closed in.

We were a distance apart where our foreheads could touch.

“Yeah, brag all you want about it! I’ll have Damien make you good as new! He’s a genius, so something like this’ll be taken care of before you…”

As I said that, Monica shook her head.

“It’s… impossible. To that professor… making me operational was… limit.”

Her voice was being cut off.

As her eyelids started to descend, I cried out.

“Monica? … Monicaaa!!”

She suddenly snapped them open again.

“Reboot procedure successfully executed!”

“… Eh?”

And at that distance, she proceeded to kiss me, and when I took some distance, taken aback, she extended her legs, and jumped up.

The blanket danced in the air, and Novem spoke.

“Ah, they were white.”

Not that! While thinking that, Aria also…

“No way. Eh, I mean!?”

Miranda-san…

“This child’s surprisingly capable.”

And Clara was…

“Praise be to the ancients.”

Popping her head out of Porter, Shannon also…

“That’s what I was trying to tell you. This one, even at that point, she was regenerating. When Lyle came, the speed of that suddenly shot up.”

Seeing her spin in the air, and putting in a magnificent rotation as she landed, I opened and closed my mouth in silence.

The ancestors also spoke. From the Second onward…

『So that’s why she’s fine.』

『Somehow, that girl's body is amazing.』
『She has a Mana line connecting her to Lyle, so I was able to get a general idea of it.』
『It's so advanced that I'm beginning to doubt whether the ancestors were truly incapable of using magic.』
『What the hell were they thinking of when they decided a maid needed abilities this high…』
『It must be romance.』

With even her maid uniform restored to its former state without a spec of dirt, she gave a polite bow.

"Once Poyopoyo, now【Monica】. Everyone, let's get along, and all that jazz. I plan on accompanying this damn chicken dickwad to the grave, so don't think you can get away from me, you bastard."

She said all that with quite a splendid smile.

"Y-you… the hell did you put out that dying atmosphere!?"

Novem spoke.

"L-Lyle-sama, please calm down!"

"Unhand me, Novem! Today of all days, I'm… h-huh?"

The Third spoke.

『How about we listen to Novem here? And wait, it's been a while since this last happened, right?』

And Monica spoke.

"I made use of your strange Mana energy to take care of any necessary repairs up to now. No, from all the battles as well, but perhaps suddenly doing a full self-repair was a little much… are you listening to me? I'm explaining for your god damn sake, master!"

I was swaying back and forth, and experiencing the signs of low Mana I hadn't felt as of late.

(Using those Skills, and the boss battle… ah, it really is harsh.)

I tried to keep up a hold on my consciousness, and Novem frantically

called out to me the way she did a while back.

“Lyle-sama, please get a hold on yourself!”

Monica spoke

“That’s what I was trying to say. Also, the previous weakened state was the restart sequence’s…”

Monica was still saying something, but my mind had completely left me.

❼

… After Lyle had lost consciousness, everyone worked together to gather and restrain the surrounding adventurers.

There was the fear they were holding concealed weapons, but Novem stripped them down to perform enough healing magic to stop the bleeding.

“Even if they wake, they shouldn’t be able to move from the broken bones.”

Miranda spoke.

“What should we do about that guy?”

On the man Lyle had dragged over, she had used some medicine they had brought to immobile his body.

According to Clara, it was a form of anesthetic.

Shannon spoke.

“Ah, that guy has something hidden on him.”

Miranda recovered the weapons from the man who had been stripped down to his underwear, and discarded them.

Aria spoke.

“He was even hiding something in his undergarments? Looks like a

foldable knife.”

They expected him to be nothing but a baggage carrier, but like Clara, he had some experience behind him.

Clara spoke.

“They’re all adventurers who’ve raised their names in the city of Arumsaas. I don’t think I’ve heard any ill rumors about them, but…”

She looked over the tied up adventurers.

They had probably had it good until now.

“… From their conversations with Lyle-sama, it’s clear they aren’t people with much good will towards us. Once He’s recovered, we’ll seek a decision from him.”

As Novem said that, Aria spoke.

“These guys were definitely trying to kill us, right!?”

As Aria had yet to quell her anger, Miranda scratched her head, and spoke.

“Then will you kill them, Aria?”

Hearing that, Aria quieted down.

(Resolve, is it… I can’t have Lyle-sama shoulder this burden, but what should I do.)

Personally, Novem wanted to finish it herself.

But this was something necessary to Lyle’s growth.

What sort of verdict would he issue?

Novem was curious about that.

(Back at Dalien, he left the disposal of the bandit brigade to a third party, so what sort of verdict will he issue here… I wonder.)

Seeing herself be left curious, Novem was slightly taken aback.

(Ah, so it's as I thought…)

As she looked at Lyle sleeping inside of Porter, Novem smiled…

❼

Having awoken, I rode on porter with a sullen expression.

Novem and Aria, and even Miranda-san and Shannon, and Clara, and Monica, were sitting on its roof, and we were proceeding forwards through the labyrinth without even using our own feet.

It truly was pleasant.

I mean, the restrictions on my Skills had been lifted.

It wasn't only me that felt unsatisfied.

Miranda-san as well.

"Equipment, foodstuff and water… leaving all that, and even healing them. Was that seriously fine?"

The adventurers that assaulted us were abandoned on the thirtieth floor without us killing any of them. Broken equipment can't revert, but we left without stealing anything off o them.

"You know, right? They didn't put much thought into it at all, and just tried to steal from us. "

They were clearly lacking in supplies.

Perhaps they usually earned around the twentieth floor, but they were much too ill-prepared.

The Second spoke.

『You guys are all too soft. Not even finishing them off yourselves.』

I ignored the ancestors, who kept silent about Monica's matter.

And I looked at the automaton sitting beside me.

“My name is Monica! The lovable maid Monica! My Master’s Monica!”

Seeing her singing in high spirits, I was unsure of whether to be irritate, or happy.

But Miranda-san didn’t seem satisfied.

“That’s one thing, but you’ll definitely regret it someday.”

I spoke.

“Yep, I’ll bet. But those men will definitely not make it to the surface.”

From the single adventurer fastened to Porter, I got a load of information.

The Skills of the other adventurers, along with what sort of comrades they had, and…

“Hmm… so you even gave them water?”

I spoke.

“Yes, it was my present. They seemed to be lacking.”

Saying that, I took on a sullen expression again.

Miranda-san appeared to sense what I wanted to say, but she remained unsatisfied.

The Sixth spoke.

『The reason you raise your own hands was for the sake of your party’s mental health… you’re being to excessive in your care of them, lyle.』

I let out a sigh, and addressed Miranda-san.

“… You wanted to show off a scene of us killing them without resistance to your sister? Well, we avoided having her taken hostage at any point, so it ended up alright.”

By taking her along, we avoided the risk of Shannon being held against us.

“If you put it like that, I can’t say any more. But remember there are no definites in this world.”

In the end, we were stalked by adventurers aiming for Porter this time around.

While thinking it would be best if I took some measures, I spoke to Miranda-san.

“Well, you’re right about that one. But still…”

The Fifth spoke.

『Those guys’re definitely never crawling up to the surface.』

Right.

I made sure to prepare some ‘magic’ water for them.

Using my Skills, I guided Porter along a safe path.

“What’s wrong?”

Miranda-san seemed curious about something, but I replied.

“It’s nothing. Also, even if they return to the surface, those guys won’t have a place left for them there anymore.

I looked at the adventurer we had captured.

His body was immobilized with medicine, and without even being able to scream, he was trembling in fear.

“Well, you’ll see when we get there.”

I left it at that.

❼

When we returned to the guild, we confirmed that they had deceased.

Epilogue

Having safely overcome the thirtieth floor, I dropped by Damien's lab.

The time it took to return was but two days.

But in essence, it was really only one.

By riding atop Porter through the labyrinth, and selecting only the safest of routes, we were able to return to the surface in only that period of time.

Shannon had an enervated expression from time spent in an unfamiliar environment, but apart from that, there weren't really any problems.

We returned, had the captured adventurer testify, and finished giving our report.

Today, I stepped into his laboratory to inquire about once Poyopoyo, now Monica.

I had eaten breakfast, and brought Monica to the academy. That part was fine and all.

But today's Monica was…

"Prostrate yourselves before me, mass produced mongrels. Having received the name『Monica』from my master, I've far transcended you numbered assembly lines."

With her chest stuck out, she domineered over the three automatons owned by Damien.

"Dammit! You should've just been destroyed then and there!"

"You intentionally took attacks onto yourself to reach a special scene… as expected of a special model. Your underhandedness is quite characteristic of you."

“A methodology as dirty as that… we would never have even imagined it.”

(Could it be these girls actually get along?)

The three automatons stared at her with irked expressions.

Seeing their faces, Monica remained stuck up in her sense of superiority.

Damien spoke.

“You saw her insides, and a red liquid flew out… they really were amazing, those ancients.”

Regardless of having been destroyed, Monica was equipped with a formidable self-repair ability. I reported that to him.

Hearing my report, Damien pushed up his glasses, and lost himself in thought.

“You won’t try destroying them as an experiment, right?”

When I asked, a little worried, the ones to react were the three automatons.

“If it’s master’s orders.”
“Right, we’re always prepared for it.”
“Now, shall we get started!?”

Seeing the automatons desire for their own destruction, I found absolute confidence that these guys were of the same sort as Monica.

Damien let out a scornful laugh.

“For what sake? I’m busy with my own research here. I tossed away automaton research to another professor already.”

Having lost interest, Damien conceded automaton research to another, it seems.

He gathered all the data he wanted, and he was currently caught up in his own research.

“Then do you not need my report?”

When I asked, he shook his head.

“I’m interested in the non-automaton-related parts. It’s Porter. The adventurers are loud and noisy about it, but the academy’s also got its eyes on it.”

Damien made a tried expression, and a voice came from the Jewel.

It was the usual fourth.

『Hmm… Lyle, the time has come for you to sell the knowhow you’ve built up for a fortune. It’s the machine that the adventurers dabbled in backhand dealing to obtain. You should be able to get gold coins numbering in the thousands… you get it, right? At the start, present an outlandish amount, and then slowly…』

I ignored him, and continued my talk with Damien.

“If it will shut up the guild, I’ll hand over all the data I’ve obtained. I’ll also add on a blueprint for a simplified model, so I’d appreciate it if you could get them to stick on a considerable pricetag.”

Damien looked over me.

He seemed a little perplexed.

“You sure? There are a few idiots out there prancing around about how it’ll amount to the fortune of the century, you know?”

Truly, Porter’s value in the labyrinth was immeasurable.

But generally, it couldn’t output that much speed.

Its movement speed was low, and its structure was specialized to this specific labyrinth.

The Fourth started shouting.

『What are you saying, Lyle!? This is where you obtain a large sum, and then save…』

The Fifth stopped him.

『If he got that much, he'd just be targeted again. It's best to take these things in moderation.』

The data in my hands was definitely valuable.

But if the academy actually got serious about it, they could probably collect it immediately.

At the same time, I don't actually think it will go that well.

"I know this from having used it, but while it's definitely excellent at baggage carrying… it takes quite a bit of talent to put to use, and more importantly, you'll have to be a middle level or higher magician. If you expand Porter, then it'll barely be able to go down a straight road in the labyrinth."

The simplified blueprints were able to traverse stairs, and turn the corners… it was a model smaller than our Porter.

Monica planned it out.

It was a smaller version optimized for baggage carrying, and ease of use.

"I'll take that as a valuable user opinion. Truly, if we plan on spreading those, it'll have to be miniature models."

Damien could use【Golem】magic.

The academy would use that and Porter to reap a huge profit.

"… The Arumsaas guild is hesitating to accept our home change request. With that previous matter, they're short on hands, and they said they definitely want us to stay."

A large party was crushed, and the guild was in turmoil.

There was the problem of the adventurer we dragged back spreading information, but the other adventurers already heard he was of the party that tried initiating an assault.

We made him move that way to begin with, so it was just as planned.

And in that chaotic Arumsaas guild, we submitted a home change request.

Damien spoke.

“How unfortunate. Lyle, you were one of the few individuals whose names I’ve committed to memory. Well, those that build up strength in this town are fated to flow elsewhere. I mean, that guild’s as you can see.”

Both the academy and guild had their objections.

It seems they wanted to buy information off of me.

Porter stood out more than I had ever imagined.

Damien grumbled over how, ‘It’s going to be stormy for a while,’ or something along those lines, as he corrected the position of his glasses with his index finger.

“I’ll pass the message to the higher-ups. Of course, even if I don’t do anything, the guild’s going to be in an uproar.”

For the past few days, whenever I dropped by, the receptionists greeted me with pale expressions.

On the other hands, the adventurers started up conversations with smiles.

From here on, I’m not sure if for better or worse, a large change was bound to happen in the guild of Arumsaas.

I was changing homes, so I wasn’t interested.

Where should I go next?

We discussed that back at the mansion.

But Aria kept making an expression troubled enough to make even me curious.

“I’ll leave it to you. I have the documents together, so I can even bring them over by tomorrow.”

“You sure are prepared.”

As Damien said that, I made a bitter smile.

“There’s a loud person who kept telling me they’d definitely be necessary.”

The Fourth within the Jewel.

From the start, he was thinking of making a fortune off of Porter.

『It’s a waste, I tell ya`! Ask for royalties, and get ten percent of their profits over the years, at least!』

He was loud about money, but after becoming an adventurer, I learned that money was important as well.

But the Sixth spoke.

『Lyle’s just an adventurer. He has no political or military power. If he makes too much of a ruckus, I don’t think it will turn out for the best.』

The Fourth resisted.

『Just how many humans do you think will be influenced by Porter!? It isn’t just those operating it. They’ll need manufacturers as well. Even people to carry our repairs! If they can raise its efficiency even further, then there will arise adventurers who can earn even more! Listen here, this investment is…』

I do hold the Fourth’s opinion in high regards, but I can’t manage all of that, nor do I have any plans on doing so.

And so, I’ll submit whatever knowhow I’ve obtained to the academy, get some money, and call it a day.

Damien asked.

“Where do you plan on going next?”

“We haven’t decided where to set as our next home, but for now, we’ll head to Centralle.”

“What about your large luggage? Do you plan to have Porter carry it?”

By large luggage, he was likely referring to what was left of the fortieth floor boss’s armor.

I purchased it because I thought it would be useful for something, but taking it along sounds a bit dubious. However, the current me doesn’t have a restriction on using Skills.

“Well, I’ll deal with that stuff with Skills and the like.”

“How convenient. I’m jealous.”

Saying that, Damien formed a smile.

Around the laboratory, Damien’s subordinates were looking upon the automatons with cramped faces.

“Kuh! Three on one is unfair!”

“Hmph! Don’t underestimate the coordination of a mass produced lineup!”
“Surround her, and go in for the kill!”
“How sturdy. I guess even when broken, she isn’t a special model for nothing!”

When I turned around, I found Monica locked in battle with the other three automatons in fluttering attire.

I spoke.

“Hah… we’re going back, Monica.”

Saying that, I departed the laboratory, and Monica followed after imparting some sharp parting remarks.

“The cute chicken dickhead’s Monica will now be accompanying his departure. Well then, farewell serial numbered mass produced defects.”

The three automatons were chewing on their aprons mortifyingly.

Perhaps I should call them complex, but they really did look like

humans.

(… For what sake was Monica built for?)

I couldn’t help but wonder that once more.

❼

… Aria had come to the adventurer whose care she had been under, Lyra.

Lyra was at work in her room, when Aria declared her intent to change homes.

Continuing on with her work, Lyra gave a response as usual.

“That so? Well, with your level of skill, you should be able to make it wherever you go. Could it be Beim next?”

Beim was called the capital of adventurers, and it was a location with no dearth of adventurer work to be found.

At the same time, its public safety was bad, and the name Capital of Adventurers was often spat out cynically.

It truly was a free city reigned over by merchants, but that was the name it was called nowadays.

“That part hasn’t been decided yet. For now, we plan to leave Arumsaas, and head for Centralle.”

If they arrived at Centralle, they could use a coupled carriage to visit most major cities.

If they wanted to move, they would likely have to stop by the city regardless.

This time’s goal was securing members.

Miranda, Clara, Shannon… they were successful in adding three of them.

It may sound nice to say they cleared their objective, but Aria was

sad to part with the women who had taken care of her for several months.

“… Adventurers part the moment they meet. On the other hand, there are also those that refuse to leave, and drag out their meetings. That’s how it goes. If you keep paying mind to it, there’ll be no end to it.”

Perhaps sensing Aria’s feelings, Lyra stopped her work.

And she spoke.

“Originally, leaving this line of work, and finding a decent job it the best option, though.”

While it may not be the case in Arumsaas, adventurers were a gathering of scoundrels.

With numerous criminals among them, they held a terrible image.

It’s different once one becomes famous, but still, there are plenty a man who’d make a sour face upon merely hearing the word, ‘Adventurer.’

Arumsaas’ special environment was one where students of the academy often registered as adventurers, so they weren’t often looked at with such eyes.

Lyra spoke.

“Dalien and Arumsaas… they’re all places abundant in work. I’m a bit worried about that, but you survived through a large-scale assault. You’ll probably be fine.”

“But that was because the enemy was negligent, or so Lyle…”

Aria recalled what Lyle had stated about the enemy.

Making good use of their Skills, and waiting for the right timing to use their tools was good on their part.

But they had underestimated the party. If the enemy had taken a little more caution, it would have been dangerous.

“If you were against those accustomed to targeting those of the same trade, it’s likely you guys would be dead. Well, guys with that level of skill are probably hard at work with mercenary jobs, but… here, with the very fact of them carefully selecting their targets, and preparing to attack, it’s certain they’re all small fried.”

In order to build up their skills as adventurers, novices would run off to Arumsaas. It was a place to hone themselves, and meet up with comrades.

Even if you could hold confidence in your strength there, that doesn’t mean it would hold true in the outside world.

“In this world, you see, it’s better to be a coward. Don’t you go around forgetting that. Well, luck’s an important one as well… your places leader’s probably a human with those things to his name.”

Luck… a factor that hard work couldn’t do anything against.

Hearing Lyle be called as a possessor of it, Aria tilted your head.

“I wonder if that’s true.”

“For all those that succeed and survive to the end, they’ve all got to have good luck. But for that part, you’ve got to watch them to the end to confirm it.”

Whether it be good or bad, Aria decided to follow along with Lyle.

It wasn’t because he had bought her life.

It was because she had decided to follow.

(… That man, could it be his confession… no, but he said he read a lot of books, didn’t he?)

There was something she was curious about.

There was also the fact that Aria wasnted to become stronger.

Lyra finished the product she was working on, and tossed it over to Aria.

“It’s a parting gift. Take it with ya’.”

“”Eh? This is…

Taking the chain with a spot to embed her gem in hand, Aria looked at Lyra.

“How long do you plan on hanging your precious trumpcard on some cheap string? You’ve got to make sure you won’t drop it.”

Following Lyra’s direction, Aria pressed her own red gem into the necklace.

Hanging it on her neck, she felt the new weight of the metal.

“Well doesn’t it suit you? You’ve got to pay a little mind to your appearance too, you know.”

As Lyra said that with a smile, Aria gave her thanks.

“T-thank you very much!”

Seeing Aria’s moist eyes, Lyra couldn’t help but feel a little bashful…

❼

The academy graduate Miranda was tidying up the Circry House’s mansion.

It was in order to get rid of it.

It was the property of her home, the Circry House, so she would have to request permission from her father, the head, before selling it. She had already sent out a letter.

She also wrote of how she graduated, and planned to live on as an adventurer.

Pertaining to Shannon’s eyes… they hadn’t fully recovered, but she was able to carry out life to some extent, or so she lied.

(But I can’t really write the entire things as a lie.)

Miranda looked towards Novem and Shannon, who were cleaning.

“Hey, make sure you do it properly.”

“It’s going to be bought off by some merchant, and sold, so of course I’ll do the cleaning before that! There’s definitely a meaning to that!”

Shannon resister her cleaning duty, but before Novem’s smiling, she screamed in fear, and continued persisting onwards.

Clara, who came to help, asked Miranda.

“Um, will I also be following?”

Miranda cleaned as she spoke.

“Of course. I mean, you’re a comrade. Ours comrade, right?”

She placed some emphasis on the word comrade, but Miranda looked at Clara, before turning back to her work.

She was a little happy.

More importantly, she started recalling the contents of the leter from her father, and began thinking on them.

Even as a daughter driven out, Miranda was still a person of the Circry House.

Her father had told her to drop by now and again.

(So he can’t help but be curious. He didn’t even oppose when I said I would become an adventurer.)

Miranda’s father seemed to think that if she had chosen that life, then there was no helping it, and he gave up.

But he wrote to stop by once, no matter what.

(I wonder if there was some sort of problem.)

Having left the main house, Miranda’s interest concerning it was quite low.

The second and third daughters had their grooms decided, and while she was studying in Arumsaas, Miranda would receive financial aid.

There was also looking after Shannon, but those around knew she had been basically driven out.

(I hope it doesn't become a problem, though…)

Miranda considered bringing up the contents of the letter with Lyle.

❼

… Within the Jewel.

The Second and Third were conversing.

『So Lyle's successfully cleared the challenge.』

『Right. It's unfortunate he didn't experience a Growth… Ah, he has physically grown, though.』

The Third seemed regretful he didn't get to witness Mr. Lyle this time around.

The Second shared that sentment, but not wasn't the time for that.

『… Hey, I think you know already, but…』

The Third nodded.

『There's an order to things. But it sounds like my turn will be dropped.』

The Second's Skill was useful, but not complex.

It generally allowed others to use one's Skills, a true Support Skill.

Its side effect allowed one to conveniently perceive the situation around them. But the difficulty in learning and applying it wasn't all that high.

The First and Second… their Skills were, compared to the others, quite peculiar.

Perhaps it's precisely because they possessed those two Skills, that the succeeding heads of history developed ones of different form.

Because the foundation was in place, they sought for characteristic Skills.

『… I was quite the plain family head, so I wonder just how many things there are out there for me to teach the boy.』

As the Second said that, the Third made a serious expression.

『The First cut through the forests, I achieved greatness in the war… when you're stuck between those two, you sure do look plain! I apologize for being so great!』

From his serious face, he suddenly burst into laughter, so the Second hit the top of his head.

The Third complained.

『Oh my, 'twas but a joke.』

『Your jokes always turn dark. Also, you went and died in battle… you're the one least fitting of it all.』

『… I also think so.』

The two remained solemn for a while, before the Second spoke.

『At the very end, at least, I want to get him to clearly make a decision. As I thought, with plainness as my base, I can't think of anything, though. Acting cool like my old man is also out of the question.』

The Second smiled, and the Third went on.

『If it's Lyle, he'll understand your troubles, Second… he's a good kid.』

As the Third said that, the Second nodded.

『He's neither crude like the first, or plain like me. He isn't pitch black like you, either. He really is a good kid.』

『How cruel~.』

The Third laughed, before putting on his serious face again.

『Well, just leave the rest to me. The other members are also reliable.』

The Second spoke.

『… Originally, we weren't even supposed to be giving advice like this. Good grief, that First Generation… it's because my old man bought that bargain blue gem that it all came down to this.』

The heads of history recorded within the gem were all truly dead.

Even so, they held memory, and they heald heart.

For what sake did the Jewel hold an ability like that?

Why had it never activated until now?

There was a mountain of things to ponder over.

If it was just to hand down the Skills, then a gem was ample at passing on the knowledge.

The Second spoke.

『Whatever the reason may be, I doubt I'll get the chance to learn it… of course, it's not like anything will come of knowing anyways.』

The Third agreed.

『Right. Why do we have a need to do something like this… it's as wondrous as that automaton.』

And like that, the two continued their conversation within the Jewel.

Question Corner

Q: Even if all the ancestors disappear, will the Best Lyle awards remain behind in the Jewel?

A: Third Generation (`▪ω▪´): “Let’s make it happen!”

Lyle (∩˚д˚): “… I didn’t hear anything, I didn’t see anything.”

Q: Did the ancestors have a stream of mistakes through Growth as well?

A: Second Generation Σ(´∀`||;): “No, that part’s a little… I don’t recall.”

Q: Lyle’s no good. I can’t understand Novem’s supremacy in this relationship. He’s not of the right caliber to make a Harem.

A: Lyle (˚д˚): “Agreement. But I can’t really hate Novem after she’s done so much, and even if you say I’m no good, I just love Novem. Harem? I have absolutely no intentions of making one. What of it?”

Q: Shouldn’t you start with training personal ability from the start? The ancestors’ actions are all over the place.

A: Fourth Generation (-@∀@): “We thought he was a technique type, but it was only in Part Two did we realize he just took a long time to experience Growth. I agree that area was definitely a strange one, but he was able to master the Skills several times quicker than we imagined, so we kinda just figured, ‘hey, shouldn’t we kinda put a restriction on him’ at some point. There was no helping it.”

Q: Lyle's reputation among the adventurers and the guild is way too low.

A: Fifth Generation (´･д･`): "In this world, placing a correct evaluation on something is not an easy task. It's because feelings exist as well. Even if you say there's no gap between male and female adventurers, try imagining Lyle being carried out by a legion of beauties… don't you find that irritating? It's something like that."

Q: You guys rely too much on those poor Forxuzes. Yet the Fifth suddenly turned them into a vassal house. Is he an idiot?

A: Fifth Generation（ ゜д゜）: "Oy, yes, I'm an idiot… there were lots of circumstances going on around the time! There's also the fact the Fourth Generation had screwed up too much."

Fourth Generation (-@∀@): "… No, but they did raise me up when I was a child, and I became head around ten, right? What's more, the Third died, and I had to inherit various things, so… I couldn't help but rely on them, right?"

Q: I have a premonition a Quilin's going to come out as a heroine. Could it be Novem's true form is a…

A: Fifth Generation Σ(゜Д゜;): "You think I wouldn't have noticed dat fluff!?"

Q: I want to see Poyopoyo's backstory.

A: MonicaΣb(`･ω･´)GUH: "How splendid. But unfortunately… I was first started up when I met that chicken dickhead. Please think of me as being zero years old."

Q: You won't make your swords of the same material as Porter?

A: Monica (´･д･`): “Well, it’s armor scraps, so if we were to put it to full use, I guess it would be as protective equipment… if we’re going that far, then I guess buying a normal high-priced sword may be the safer option. If it’s drills, I can prepare them at a moment’ notice, though.”

Lyle DO NOT (゜⊿゜) WANT

Q: Can the First’s Skill, and the large sword be used freely?

A: Lyle (´･ω･`): “I could have used them if I wanted to, but due to the tasks, I had them sealed off myself. Because the moment I used them, I would have failed the task anyways.”

Q: About Arumsaas’ guild’s treatment, and the punishments. It’s not enough!

A: Sixth Generation (´･∀･`): “… The guild is currying favor with the Academy, and he’s Damien’s friend. If I say that much, you get it, right? Arumsaas’ guild sees that academy they can’t go against as Lyles ally. So what would happen to a staff member who sold out information knowing it would lead to a raid against him… there’s also the injured adventures he saved, and others he helped in town, so… oh, that’s enough of that.”

Q: I’m tired of stories about the resolve to kill. Get over it!

A: Seventh Generation (･∀･): “The resolve to kill? Do you understand why so many such scenes exist? Without that, what would you empathize with… wait, you’re’ serious about this? Well, if you want to consider this world’s sense of values… they’re been adventurers for little over half a year…”

…

Lyle (゜Д゜): “Should I bring back the attackers’ ***** with me? It’ll serve as a nice threat. Or perhapt their ***** ****** would be

better?”

Novem (´･∀･`): “That’s heavy, so how about we settle for their ****** or ****? Ah, of course, we’re collecting their guild cards, and valuables.”

Aria (゜д゜): “I’ll definitely never forgive that guild receptionist! Let’s make an example of him. We’re hanging up his *******, alright!”

Miranda (`･ω･´): “If it’s *******, then I happen to be an expert on the subject! I’ll take out his ********** alive, and soak it in his ****!”

Shannon (´ɜω･`): “That’ll be noisy, so make sure you stuff his mouth first. You’ll disturb the neighbors.”

Clara (´-ω-`): “Do you want to sell off the families of the ones that sold information as slaves? The men to the mines, and the women to the streets. For the children, there are some people with… special hobbies out there…”

Monica Σ(゜Д゜;): “Humans are scarrrryy!!”

Heads of History: ”Oh my, you kids are still much too soft…”

…

Seventh Generation (゜Д゜): “… See? Not a millimeter of empathy, right? If they could do it, that would be scary in itself. If you go to too high of an extreme, it becomes like that. At present, Lyle, Novem, and Aria would still kill in revenge if one of their comrades were killed off. Miranda and Shannon would be a little hesitant to do it personally. Clara has a certain extent of experience as an adventurer, so she may be used to it. There was a need to keep it mildly mild, so it ended up like this.”

Fifth Generation (･∀･): “To add onto that, Lyle set it up so they would get annihilated regardless. He was more than resolved.”

Q: Despite being a group with considerable competence in using Skills, they entered the labyrinth without adequate preparations, and they were in a situation where it would’ve

been possible for them do die off without Lyle even doing anything. Why not put a little more thought into it?

A: Second Generation (´･д･`): “If the attacking squad was just a little more careful, it would be Lyle’s group that was annihilated. Story ends there. Thanks for reading.”

Third Generation (´･∀･`): “And so what if they had Skills? There’s no meaning if they don’t master them, and we used our powers to put those conceited SOBs in their places. But is that something strange? They seemed to be reliant on Skills, and Lyle was in a state without them up to recently. In order for him not to become like that, we put the restrictions up, didn’t we?”

Fourth Generation (-@∀@): “The enemy had their preparations in place. It’s just that it was insufficient to aim for the Thirtieth floor. By the way, they were taking measures to annihilate Lyle’s party, and on top of that… we stuck a「Double Standards」tag onto the story’s genre, so we should be fine.”

Q: You wrote there were some who could stomach magic water out there, so I can’t imagine all of them being wiped out. The ancestors’ stance that it was absolutely impossible is questionable.

A: Lyle(´･ω･`): “… If their remnants would have been able to safely return in that state, I would never have created Porter in the first place. Would a group that was known to have attacked those of their same trade actually cooperate with one another with their limited supply of consumables to aim for the surface? If all that was possible, we wouldn’t have done that.”

Credits

Author	—	(わい) Wai
Publication platfom	—	syosetu.com
Translator	—	Yoraikun
Book designer	—	Armaell